HAROLD REIN

Few Were Left

John Day

April 2, 1955

To Rose and George —

My dream – to a large extent – has come true. You are about to realize yours. May it be everything you have wanted it to be.

Sincerely,

Hesh

(Sometimes known as Harold Rein)

Few Were Left

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a novel by HAROLD REIN

THE JOHN DAY COMPANY
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To EDIE

Few Were Left

CHAPTER I

ARTHUR TEMMER looked down at the gleaming rails in the track pit and knew without the slightest doubt that when the Uptown train came, he would jump in front of it. If only it weren't taking so long to get to him. If it didn't get there soon, someone might come down into the station and try to stop him. But then if that happened, he thought, he would simply throw himself on the third rail. That would do the job very nicely.

Suddenly he became cold, though sweat streamed down his face and from his armpits. He had made the mistake of thinking about it. You were not supposed to let yourself think about it. If you did, you left an opening for fear to crawl in. And once fear got in, you weren't sure any more that you would go through with it.

He shifted his position at the edge of the platform and reached down to massage his legs, which hung into the track pit. They had grown numb and felt like dead weights. For a moment he was able to block out all thought as he concentrated on his legs, but then his eyes fell on the tracks again, and he could not help shuddering. Any minute now the train would come, he thought, and with it, death. But that was what he wanted, wasn't it? Well, wasn't it? he repeated to himself. He could not answer, and found himself thinking about what death must be like. Quietness? Nothingness? Or would it be something he had never expected—pain, agony?

His legs did not respond to the massage, and so he stopped. He would not need them anyway. When the train came, he could push himself into the track pit with his arms. But where was the train? How much longer would he have to sit there and listen to the thoughts which confused and frightened him?

Suddenly he heard footsteps descending the stairs, and he quickly looked about for a place to hide. About twenty feet away, where the platform came to a dead end, he saw a narrow ledge which extended into the tunnel. Pulling his lifeless legs up on the platform, he turned over on his stomach and, using only his arms, painfully dragged himself toward the ledge. If he could reach the tunnel, he would be safe from the footsteps. And he could wait for the train there as well as anywhere.

As he dragged himself along, he had to push against a taunting thought which tried to force him back: Why

was he trying to hide? Why didn't he throw himself on the third rail as he had said he would? A deep loathing for himself welled up within his chest, almost suffocating him. Was he really going to go through with it, or was he afraid? He swore at himself and pushed along harder. He'd go through with it, all right. He had forgotten about the third rail only because he had set his mind on waiting for the train. That was the way he had planned it and that was the way he would do it. He wouldn't run away again.

When finally he reached the ledge and entered the dark tunnel, his arms were quivering and his scraped knees felt as if they were on fire. After he caught his breath and a sudden giddiness finally went away, he sat up against the wall of what appeared to be a small tool house, pulled the legs of his trousers up above his knees, and blew gently on the bruised skin. He became so preoccupied with his knees that he didn't realize until quite a few minutes later that there was silence in the station again. But what had become of the footsteps? Had they been a trick of his imagination? God, that must have been some rotten stuff he had drunk. But he was sure he had heard footsteps. Perhaps it was someone who had found himself in the wrong subway and so went back up to the street. Yes, that was probably it. "Goddammit!" he grunted, angry because he had hurt his knees for nothing. But his anger dwindled to grim amusement. How goddam funny it was that he should be sore at some unknown footsteps because they had caused him to hurt a part of his body, when at any moment he was willfully going to destroy the whole

of it. He wished he could remember what he'd had to drink.

He stared down at the tracks which would carry *his* train and followed them through the shadowy tunnel until they made a sharp turn and disappeared from sight. He calculated he would see the train at least twenty seconds before he would have to jump.

Did subway trains have large single headlights like locomotives?

The chill returned, and he decided to switch his thoughts to something else. Anything. A cigarette. But then he heard the footsteps again. They came from farther down the platform. A woman's heels. Pulling his knees up under his chin and backing up closer to the wall, he sat listening to them. He wondered what she looked like. What was a woman doing in the subway at this hour anyway? But what time was it? he thought. It had been late when he'd first come down. He could dimly remember seeing an illuminated clock in a drugstore window. Three A.M. But what time was it now? A whole day could have passed for all he knew.

The woman was nervous. The sound of the heels never let up. Click, click, click-click—and then a slight pause, and then the clicking again, and then another pause. The distance she paced was short. It wasn't meditative pacing —this was the nervous kind. Then he heard other footsteps, first on the stairs and then on the platform. Men's. The clicking heels stopped. Someone began whistling "The Beer Barrel Polka." A purse clicked shut.

From far off in the distance came a faint rumbling sound. It could be the train, Arthur thought, feeling the beat of his heart quicken, but it sounded more like thunder! And then he heard a man's voice, husky and scared. There was more thunder, closer and louder this time, shaking the platform. A woman's shrill scream rose above the drumming echoes. Then came a long series of deafening blasts, and Arthur buried his head in his arms. Steel and stone crashed to the ground, and he heard a screeching prayer.

Suddenly there was an explosion in his head, and then there was only still blackness.

CHAPTER 2

ARTHUR SPIT the dust from his mouth and rubbed his eyes. As the numbness gradually left his body, he felt a dull, throbbing ache in the back of his head. His fingers found a huge damp bump there. "Jesus Christ," he muttered. He tried to set his thoughts in order, but could think of nothing to say but "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ . . ." And then he remembered the clicking heels and the others on the platform. "Hey!" he shouted into the darkness. "Anybody there? Anybody alive?"

A piece of tile fell from the wall and clanged against a rail.

He struggled dizzily to his feet and groped his way along the ledge until he reached the platform. He knew there was a stairway at that end of the platform, so he

climbed over the wall of rubble which lay in his path and began to search for it. He peered into the thick dust until his eyes smarted; at first he could see nothing, but when his eyes adjusted to the dim gray light which danced through the dust, he saw that the stairway was completely obstructed by debris. Only a small corner of the bottom step had escaped burial.

He carefully worked his way up the platform through the slowly settling haze, stumbling over chunks of concrete and protruding spikes of twisted steel, and reached the next stairway. It, too, was sealed. He continued toward the north end of the platform and investigated the three remaining stairways. Two of them were blocked like the others and one of them had collapsed completely, leaving a huge hole in the ceiling through which a mountain of rubble had fallen. From what he could see through the hole, the upper level was more damaged than the train level, and he guessed that the explosions, or whatever they were, must have taken place on the surface.

The dust began to settle more quickly now, and he was able to pick out recognizable objects around him. An orange-and-blue trash can stood in the center of the platform, by some miracle left untouched, but everything else seemed to be in fragments. The penny weighing-machine had been thrown over on its back and had cracked in half, two benches had been reduced to splinters by the steel columns which had fallen on them, and a sign which read ALL PERSONS ARE FORBIDDEN TO ENTER UPON OR CROSS THE TRACKS lay on the tracks. Most of the

ceiling plaster had fallen, and large sections of the concrete platform had cracked off and fallen into the two track pits. Arthur studied the sagging ceiling beams and found himself thinking that perhaps the ceiling would soon collapse and that his suicide plan would be carried out after all, if only by default.

The ruined subway station, a moment ago suspended in silence, seemed to catch its breath and began making little aching sounds: a sagging beam creaked, water dripped rhythmically from a cracked pipe, and pieces of tile and plaster fell belatedly to the many junk heaps. Arthur shook his head, as if trying to clear his ears of water, and walked across the platform. He made his way to one of the smashed benches and tore off a loosened slat. Then, turning, he went to the nearest stairway and began digging into the rubble which filled it. Sealing off his mind from all thought, he worked for almost an hour, slowly, almost mechanically, but made hardly any progress. There were splinters in his hands from the jagged slat, so he threw it aside and searched for something more suitable. Finally he found a long metal rod half-buried in a mound of rubble. As he pulled at the rod, he heard a low gurgling sound, and he jumped back. He waited a moment, but heard nothing more. He reached forward and gingerly touched the rod again, but this time there was no sound. He pulled at the rod, swearing at himself for being such a fool. He wondered if he could still be drunk and if the whole thing were really a bad case of the D.T.'s.

Then he heard the sound again, a man's voice, groaning. The groaning grew louder and seemed to be coming from directly under his feet. He began to dig frantically. In a few minutes he uncovered a man's shoe and then the whole leg. He threw aside the rod and pulled at the leg, but could not move it. He began digging again, now with his bare hands; the rod had become too clumsy. Soon his hands were cut and bleeding. But he continued digging until he uncovered the lower half of a man's body. Suddenly he realized that the groaning had stopped. He began to dig where he thought the covered head should be and finally uncovered a pale, round face.

Arthur wanted desperately to know if the man was still alive, but he was afraid to stop and examine him, and so kept pulling away debris until he had completely uncovered him. Then, exhausted, he sank to his knees and fell over on his side against a mound of crumbled concrete without even looking at the man. Arthur closed his eyes and pink-red flashes danced before him. His open mouth sucked in the dust he had stirred up, and he longed for a drink. And then he remembered having seen some puddles of water in one of the track pits. He crawled to the edge of the platform and dropped heavily into the track pit. Eagerly he scooped up some of the oily water and sucked it from his cupped hands. He tasted blood from the cuts on his hands, and it reminded him of the man. He stood up and glanced over at him; he seemed to be dead.

He removed his Army field jacket and dipped the

edge of a sleeve into one of the puddles. Then he climbed back up to the platform and went over to the man. Gently he dabbed the edge of the wet sleeve over the dry, slightly parted lips, but the man remained motionless. He squeezed the wet sleeve over the face and a few drops of water splashed on it. The lips twitched slightly and slowly parted. Then the eyes opened, staring straight up at the ceiling. There was a warm, pleasant feeling in Arthur's stomach. "How do you feel?" he asked.

The man shook his head from side to side as if trying to shake its parts back into working order, shifted his gaze from the ceiling toward Arthur's face, and said, "Who're you? Who did this to me?"

Arthur grinned and wondered why he didn't ask where he was. Everybody was supposed to ask that when they regained consciousness. "Nobody did anything to you," he said to the man. "Something happened upstairs and the whole goddam place is blown up. Can you move?"

The man extended his arm, and Arthur pulled him up to a sitting position. He sat silently and looked straight ahead. "My leg—" he said finally, "it hurts like hell."

"Then you'd better stay put," Arthur said. "If it's broken, you don't want to make it worse."

The man stuck his hand into his coat pocket and pulled out a fat wallet. "Here," he said, producing a small card, "here's my Blue Cross card. Call an ambulance, will you, and give them this. I think I'm going to pass out."

"Hey, wait a minute," Arthur said, as the fat body slumped in his arms. "I can't call anybody."

He patted the man's flabby face, but the eyes remained closed. He put his ear to the man's chest and heard a faint, uneven heartbeat. "Blue Cross—that's a laugh. A hell of a lot of good it'll do him. It'll be days before anybody can get down here to us."

Arthur rose, walked down the platform to the mound under the hole in the ceiling and climbed to the top of it. Cupping his hands to his mouth, he shouted, "Hello, up there! Anybody there? Hello! Come and get us! This guy's hurt!"

He waited for the echoes to die out and then strained his ears for an answering voice or the sound of some movement. The complete silence made him distrust his ears, and he swallowed deeply to clear them. Still not a sound. He could hear his own heartbeat in his ears and he heard his stomach growl. Soon the silence became oppressive, and he climbed back down the mound. He looked at the card the man had given him and read the name on it: "Carl Norman." Now what did a guy want with two first names?

"Well, Carl," he said, coming up to the stretched-out form, "nobody up there to give your Blue Cross card to. Looks like we're going to punk out together. Only I wish I were out like you. I'm hungry. You got something to eat? Fat men are always eating. Maybe you've got a candy bar or something, huh?"

He knelt on one knee and slipped his hand into a side pocket of the man's jacket. The eyes opened slightly and he jerked back his hand. The eyes closed. This time

Arthur just patted the outside of the pocket. Nothing there. He tried the other pocket. Empty. He passed his hand under the jacket to the inside pocket and withdrew the fat brown wallet he had seen before. It was bulging with money. He flicked his finger over the bills and made a fast count. Over two hundred dollars. Who is this guy? he thought.

The eyes opened again and the lips began to move. Arthur hid the wallet behind his back.

"Put it back," the fat man said hoarsely.

Arthur threw the wallet at him and rose to his feet. "Look, Fatso," he said, looking down at the eyes which had closed again, "I wasn't stealing your wallet. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't get out of here with it. We're stuck down here, do you understand? And if we don't get out soon, we're both going where that dough isn't going to mean a damn thing."

The man opened his eyes and signaled for Arthur to help him sit up. Arthur grudgingly clutched his outstretched hand.

"Maybe you'd better stay down, Norman. You don't look so good."

"How did you know my name?" the fat man gasped.

"It's right here on your Blue Cross card: Norman comma Carl. Carl Norman. That's you, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's me," he murmured as he slipped from Arthur's grasp and fell backward, unconscious.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOUND of snoring startled Arthur, who had begun to doze, and he quickly turned to the fat man. Although he had been standing watch over him for a long time now, he had somehow given up the idea that he was still alive. He had wanted to feel his pulse and touch his heart, but had found he could not make himself do it. Something in him had made him afraid of confirming the man's death. The others who had come down into the station undoubtedly were dead, he thought, and this man and he were the only survivors. But why should it make any difference to him whether the fat man lived or not? Why should he be afraid of being alone? Upstairs, on the street, with a thousand little fat men, he would still be alone. He wished now that the man had died so

that he could prove to himself that he didn't need him. Then, as if the sleeping man had affronted him, Arthur rose and walked toward the other end of the station.

Midway along the platform, he heard a moan. Turning quickly, he started back, glad, in spite of himself, that the fat man was coming to life. Again he heard the moaning. But it was not the fat man. It was coming from one of the track pits. He scrambled through the debris, taking long, high steps, like a man crossing a shallow stream, and stopped at the edge of the platform. When the dust he had stirred up finally settled, he saw the partly exposed head of someone who had been buried under a mound of rubble.

Arthur jumped into the track pit, fell to his knees beside the mound, and began pulling off the larger chunks of debris. It seemed that the more weight he lifted from the mound, the louder the awful moaning became. It was a relentless cadence caller, urging him on faster and faster until the dried-up cuts on his hands sprung open afresh, mixing his blood with the fine powdered plaster which covered everything.

When finally he removed the last piece of debris, the moaning ceased, and though it had frightened him as he had worked, he now became alarmed when it stopped. He looked at the face, a thin boyish face, but saw no life there. He picked up one of the wrists and felt for the pulse, but could not find it. He placed his ear against the boy's chest, but the ringing in his head made it impossible for him to hear. He began patting the boy's cheeks,

softly at first, but finally building up to hard, sharp slaps. The eyes began to blink, but it wasn't until Arthur's hand inadvertently struck the nose that the boy sprang to life. "Stop! What you doing?" he blurted, sitting up suddenly. But then, as quickly as it had appeared, the spark of consciousness flickered and died, and the boy fell over on his side.

Arthur placed his thumb on one of the boy's eyelids and raised it. The eyeball moved slightly, and the eyelid strained to close under his thumb. He was alive. Arthur felt the warm, pleasant sensation in his stomach again, and knew that he was glad this boy was alive. He had read somewhere once that the Chinese believed that the stomach was the seat of the emotions. He guessed maybe they had something there, for although he had tried many times to make himself believe that he had stripped himself of all sentiment, he always found that his stomach gave him away.

He rose and looked down at the boy. His hair was blond and close-cropped, and he wore an Air Force uniform. He looked young to be in the service, Arthur thought. Even the dirt smears couldn't hide the boyishness in the small-boned face. As he watched, a grimace spread across the boy's face and his eyes opened slightly. Arthur knelt beside him and said quietly, "It's all right, Soldier, you're O.K. Can you get up?"

"I don't know. I think so. Where's the lady? She dead?"

"I guess so. That fat man was the only one I found."

"But she was right near me when it happened. She should be around here somewhere."

Arthur began to search in the track pit. The light that somehow squeezed into the station was too faint for him to see distinctly, so he crawled along, feeling with his hands. But still he found no trace of the woman.

"She's got to be here somewhere," the boy insisted. "I even felt her hit against me when it happened."

"Look, she's not here! I felt around all the piles and none of them are big enough to bury a woman completely."

"Well maybe she crawled away someplace. Maybe she's in the tunnel."

"All right, I'll go see. She couldn't have gone very far."

He started down the tracks and entered the tunnel, but when he had gone only a few feet inside, the little light there had been disappeared as suddenly as if someone had pulled a switch. He stared into the darkness and remembered a morning, not long ago, when he had awakened crouched in a doorway, and opening his eyes, had seen nothing but blackness. For nearly a full minute he had been blind, and he had almost torn his eyeballs from his head in despair. And now again he rubbed his eyes as if they could be made to see by vigorous massage. When he opened them again, he saw tiny specks of flashing color, but these soon faded into blackness. He looked through his pockets and found a single wooden match.

He rubbed his thumbnail against its head and it burst into a bright flame which cut thickly into the blackness. But in a few seconds, even before his eyes had become accustomed to the light, the flame flickered and died. It was useless to go on; he would have to go back for more matches.

He groped his way out of the tunnel and again passed through the sudden division of darkness and light. He walked over to the boy, who was sitting up now, and asked him if he had any matches. The boy nodded and reached into his shirt pocket. As Arthur took them from him, he saw that they were moist. He examined them closely. The heads of the matches were intact and they might work when they were dry, but there were only seven of them.

"This all you've got?"

"Yes. Aren't they enough? They should last till you find her."

"That's not what worries me. If she's in there, I'll find her, but what are we going to use for light around here? It's getting late, and pretty soon there'll be no light at all coming from upstairs."

"Well, they'll be getting us out pretty soon, won't they?"

"I don't know. Fatso over there seems to think so, too, but I haven't heard a thing up there."

"But they know we're down here, don't they?"

"I said I don't know. But I do know that if it's going

to get as dark in here as it is in that tunnel, we'd better find some way of getting some light. Build a fire or something."

"Why don't we try yelling, make a lot of noise? Then they'll be sure to know we're down here."

"Listen, there's no sense getting excited. If someone's up there, they know about us and they'll get us out."

"What do you mean *if* someone's up there? There's got to be someone up there!"

"Sure, sure. Now you take it easy. You'll need your strength to help me move that junk out of the stairway. I'm going over to see if Fatso has any matches."

Carl Norman was still on his back. He was staring at a broken light bulb in the ceiling. Without turning his eyes to Arthur, who had come over to him, he said, "I've been lying here listening, and do you know what I've been hearing? Nothing. Not a damn thing."

"Got any matches on you?"

"Not a damn thing. Except that goddam dripping water."

"Look, do you have any matches? There's a woman in the tunnel, and it's dark in there."

"Who were you talking to over there?"

"Dammit, do you have any matches?"

"In my vest pocket. Can't you stop that water from dripping?"

Arthur counted the matches in Carl Norman's book. Three. That made ten altogether—seven of them wet.

He nervously searched his own pockets again, though he knew he wouldn't find any.

"You know," Carl Norman began in a sing-song tone, "I've been figuring they're probably working over us right now, only we can't hear them. After all, you can't always hear the subway when you're upstairs on the street, can you?"

"I don't know. I never tried to listen."

"Yes, the way I figure it, they'll be getting to us pretty soon now."

Arthur turned and started toward the track pit to look in the tunnel for the woman. As he crouched to lower himself into the pit, his hand fell on what looked like a broom handle. He pulled at it and uncovered the whole broom. It had probably come from that little tool house in the tunnel, he thought. Maybe there was more equipment there—maybe even one of those flashlights he'd seen the trackwalkers use. As he scrambled toward the tool house, he wondered what had become of the man who had been using the broom, and all of the other subway workers who might have been in the station at the time of the explosions; but the thought of finding a flashlight, and possibly other tools they could use, pushed the question to the back of his mind. He would look for the subway workers later.

He reached the end of the platform and carefully felt his way along the narrow ledge into the tunnel. He ran his hands along the coarse surface of the wall until he

felt the smooth wood of the door. He tried the knob, but the door was locked. He gave it a trial push with his shoulder and it rattled in its frame. Heartened, he pushed against it harder, but the lock held. It would take a lot more force to do the job, he decided. He moved cautiously toward the edge of the ledge, using an extended foot as a blind man uses his cane, and then, with nearly two feet between him and the door, he turned and threw his body at it. The door crashed open, and he fell forward into the tool house.

An odd quirk in his reasoning had led him to think that once he had penetrated the tool-house door, he would find the interior lighted. And now, as he lay dazed on the floor, he was bitterly disappointed to find that the blackness was just as thick inside. He rose, took Carl Norman's book of matches from his pocket, and struck one. To the right of the entrance there were two steel lockers, and against the far wall there was—— "Dammit!" he swore as the flame reached his fingertips. As he lit another match, he automatically performed some simple subtraction: eight matches left, and seven of them might be useless. By the light of the second match he found a copy of the *Daily News* in one of the steel lockers and rolled it up and set fire to it. It made a wonderful torch, but the flame burned hungrily, and he realized that he would have to work fast. He went to the tool closet at the far end of the room and opened its door. His eyes fell on two flashlights which lay on one of the shelves, and he happily threw aside the newspaper

torch. He reached for one of the flashlights and pressed his thumb against its switch. A cool white light jumped from it to mingle with the dying flame of the newspaper.

He turned the light into the closet and made a quick inventory: the second flashlight, four brooms, a spade, two shovels, two small hammers, two screw drivers, a pair of pliers, some loose copper wire, a pile of dirty rags, and a cigar box filled with odds and ends. He decided on the flashlights, the spade, and the two shovels.

He picked up the equipment and started back, the flashlight making an even path through the darkness. As he turned into the main platform, he heard the excited cries of the boy. He tried to hurry through the rubble, but the tools held him back.

When he reached the edge of the platform, he dumped the shovels and the spade into the track pit and then jumped down after them. He turned the flashlight on the boy's face, for by now the light in the station was going fast, and asked, "Now what was all the shouting about?"

"I heard her. In there, in the tunnel. I told you she was in there. She was crying. You'd better go get her—quick!"

"O.K., O.K. If she's in there, she's in there. Nothing else can happen to her."

He turned abruptly and started toward the tunnel. A quarter of an hour later, when he had gone well inside the tunnel and still hadn't found the woman, he concluded that somehow he had missed her along the way. She couldn't possibly have gotten this far, he thought.

Especially if she were hurt. He projected the beam of the flashlight far ahead of him and swept the walls with the light, but saw no one. He decided to turn back and retrace his steps carefully. This time he would drown every inch of the way in light and take no chances on missing her again. He walked between the rails, where there was a minimum of debris, and carefully probed the darkness. About halfway back he found her. She was sitting up against the wall of the tunnel with her head hanging loosely forward. Her eyes were open, but she did not react to the glaring light. Arthur tilted her head back, and although he shone the light directly in her eyes, they did not flicker. She was a good-looking woman, he decided, stepping back and running the light over her entire body. About thirty-five and in pretty good shape. It was odd how neat she still looked. Her clothes were in almost perfect order, there were no dirt smudges on her anywhere, and her hair looked as if it had just been combed. Those are the clicking heels I heard, he thought, looking down at the high-spiked shoes she wore.

Shouting at the end of the tunnel interrupted his thoughts, and although the voice was distorted by the tunnel, he recognized it as the boy's. "Now what in hell does he want?" he grumbled. "What is she to him anyway?" He ignored the boy's calls and purposely lingered, studying the motionless woman. When the shouting finally stopped, he lifted the woman to her feet. He had been prepared to carry her and was surprised when

she stood on her own power and even took a few steps forward. He took her arm and led her up the tracks.

The boy was waiting for them at the end of the tunnel. "Is she hurt?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Arthur answered. "Just dazed. Here, take hold of her. Let's get her up on the platform."

"That other guy's been talking a blue streak," the boy said. "I couldn't make any of it out except that he kept telling me not to steal his wallet when I didn't even know he had a wallet."

Arthur propped the woman up against a column. Immediately her head sagged forward.

"Good-looking, isn't she?" the boy whispered.

The woman's eyes were closed now, and her face seemed softer in sleep.

"She your friend?" Arthur asked.

"No. Never saw her before I came down here. Funny how she doesn't even look messed up, isn't it? Look at me—this uniform is shot."

Arthur sat down beside the woman and closed his eyes.

"Are you going to sleep?" the boy asked incredulously. "Aren't we going to . . . Look, Mister—say, what's your name anyway? Mine's Bob Thomas."

"Arthur."

"Well look, Art, don't you think we'd better start working on the stairway like you said? They're probably working upstairs to get us out, and it'll be that much quicker if we can meet them part of the way."

"Take it easy. The light down here is shot now. We'd

have to burn a flashlight to work by, and we can't afford to waste our light. We may be down here for a while, and there aren't any spare batteries."

"You mean you don't think they know we're down here?"

"I didn't say that. I only said we'd better save our light. We can work tomorrow when the daylight comes back down in here."

"It isn't possible a whole day has gone by already, is it?"

"You've got me. It sure looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Well, maybe it got cloudy outside and the sun's covered up."

"Could be."

"What do you suppose happened anyway?"

"How the hell am I supposed to know?" Arthur snapped.

Yet somehow he did know, or, at least, thought he knew. But he would not admit it even to himself, and abruptly shut off his thoughts. Now if the boy would only keep quiet, he could get some sleep. That's what he needed right now, a little sleep.

* * *

Thomas glowered at Arthur, who seemed to be asleep. Who did he think he was, snapping at him like that? All he'd done was ask a logical question. You don't get your head nearly blown off and then sit back and pretend nothing's happened.

He squinted at his wrist watch. Four o'clock. The sweephand had stopped. Some shock-proof watch! Well, at least he would never forget what time it was when it happened. Four A.M. It was like a murder mystery he once read in which they knew the exact time of the crime because the victim's watch had been broken in the struggle. He wondered what time it was now. Could a whole day really have passed? But where did the time go? How long had he been unconscious? It was funny, he thought, this was the first time he had ever been unconscious, and he didn't feel bad at all.

The woman made a sound, and Thomas quickly moved closer to her. He had been wrong about Art's being asleep, for he had heard her, too, and had turned on the flashlight. The woman stared at them, puzzled, and shielded her eyes from the light.

"It's all right, ma'am," Thomas said quickly. "Nothing to worry about. You're O.K. now."

She began to move her lips to say something, but instead broke out crying. Thomas watched the tears slide down her cheeks and began to feel uncomfortable. For the last half hour he had been trying to build up a shell of indifference to what had happened, as Art seemed to have done, and for a moment there he'd almost done it, but now this woman, with her face all screwed up and the tears coming down, made him want to cry, too. Why couldn't he hear the rescue workers? They had to be up there!

"Will you be all right?" Art asked the woman. "I'm going to shut off the light now."

She nodded her head and stopped weeping.

Just as easy as turning off a water faucet, Thomas thought. If it was so easy for her to stop, why did she have to start in the first place, and make everybody feel rotten? He leaned back against the small mound he had been using for a back rest and idly fingered the mouth organ in his shirt pocket. He could go for a little music right now. Maybe it would help get rid of the lump in his throat. "Say," he began hesitantly, "do you mind if I play my mouth organ for a while?"

"No, go ahead," Art said, taking a last look with the light at the fat man stretched out on the platform.

And then the woman spoke up for the first time. "Yes, please play," she said.

Thomas took the mouth organ from his pocket. If there was anything he liked, it was playing the mouth organ. He wasn't a Larry Adler or a Borrah Minevitch, but in the short time he had been playing, he already knew two songs by heart. It was a lucky thing he had his mouth organ along with him. When people are in a jam, music is the best thing in the world to keep their nerves relaxed. Like in that movie he'd seen about the P.O.W.'s in North Korea. If it hadn't been for the fellow with the mouth organ, the prisoners would have been at each other's throats.

He ran his tongue over the reeds and took a few practice blows and draws on the high end, which had been

going flat. When he got out of here, he would buy a real good Hohner. He started on "Oh! Susannah," lost his way, and started again. When he finished, he didn't wait for their comments, but went right into "Flow Gently Sweet Afton," playing, it seemed to him, with more sweetness than he had ever been able to squeeze out of the song before. When he finished, he waited expectantly for his audience's reaction. The woman spoke first. He had been half-afraid that she had fallen asleep again.

"That was very nice," she said. "Won't you play some more?"

"Yes, go ahead," Art added without enthusiasm.

He began "Oh! Susannah" again. Just as he finished it and began to flow gently into the "Sweet Afton," Art interrupted him. "Those the only songs you know?"

"Of course not," Thomas answered indignantly. "I've got a whole book of songs I can play. But so far these are the only ones I know by heart, and my book's back at the base."

"Let him play," the woman said.

"Sure, I don't want him to stop. I was just wondering if he knew anything besides those two."

Thomas forgot which song he had been playing and started on "Susannah" again.

* * *

Arthur kept his eyes closed, but gave up trying to fall asleep. In spite of himself, he found that he was singing along in his mind with the harmonica. The kid wasn't any

good at all. Still a book-player, no feeling; but Arthur liked the sound of the harmonica, and even the worst player reminded him of the wonderful harmonicas he had heard in hundreds of shantytowns and two-cop jails throughout the country. There was that little Mexican, playing those Mexican folk tunes that made you want to dance even though you knew you'd look like a damn fool when you did. And Burke—big fat Burke, who had once been a clown with Ringling. You wished to God you had never left home when he started on his own brand of blues. Burke was known as the Player, and when he blew into a camp, he wouldn't get a chance to warm his hands over the fire before everyone was begging him for his music. And then, after he had played for a few hours, uncovering memories that were buried under years of dust, some of the men would turn their backs to the fire and try to pretend their heads were bowed because they were sleepy.

Burke never had to worry about food. There was always something to eat for a visiting artist, and nobody would even think of suggesting he do his share of the foraging. Yet Burke never ate until he had played. And when he did eat, it was with an indifference that astonished Arthur. Maybe that was what had attracted him to Burke. Here was a man who seemed to enjoy playing a harmonica even more than eating.

Burke had taken a liking to him, too, and one day, without a word passing between them, it became under-

stood that "Junior," Burke's name for him, could go along with Burke wherever he went. It was funny about that "Junior" with Arthur. He had flattened a lot of guys because they called him that. Only Burke had the right to use the name, and right after Arthur had laid somebody out, spitting blood, Burke would Junior him all over the place, to the bewilderment of everyone around the fire. But then Burke would begin playing his harmonica, and even the victim would sit up and listen dreamily. Sometimes it was blues and sometimes it was gypsy music, Arthur's favorite. It was music that crept deep inside you. And sometimes it brought tears to your eyes because it made you remember things you wanted to forget.

The boy's music was bad, and the cavernous subway station made it sound tinny, but Arthur didn't care. He wasn't listening; his ear was tuned to the finest performance Burke had ever given, blues and gypsy and cowboy and rag, all blended together in a sort of anthem of the road. And so he didn't realize that the harmonica had been silent a long time. He was sorry he hadn't remembered to say something nice to the kid about his playing. It was lousy harmonica, but it had taken him back to Burke, and he was grateful for that.

"That was pretty good, Thomas," he said at last.

"Thanks. Say, would you like to try it? It's easy."

Arthur wished Thomas had not said that. Burke's playing had never seemed easy. When he had listened to the fat clown's music, he had liked to think that Burke had

spent many difficult years of study and practice to play the way he did.

"I'm not much of a musician," he said to Thomas. "In school we had two sections in music class: the singers and the listeners. I was the best damn listener in the class."

"Didn't you ever play an instrument?"

"No, but I finally learned how to sing. And you know what did it? Beer. I bet if I'd had some beer when I was a kid, I'd have been the Caruso of the Glee Club."

"When I was in sixth grade," Thomas said, "the school loaned me a trombone to play. The only trouble was, the teacher never taught me how to read music; he just put numbers over the notes and showed me where those numbers were on the slide. I'd blow into the darn thing, but it never came out sounding like music. What I wanted was an accordion. They sure make nice music."

"I wish I could play the harmonica," the woman broke in. "Something you can carry around with you. I play the piano."

"A piano would have been better than my darn trombone," Thomas said. "At least you can play hot stuff on a piano. What kind of music did you play, Miss . . . Miss . . ."

"Just Cassie."

"Well, I'm Bob and this is Art. Art's the one who brought you out of the tunnel. But I was the one who told him you were in there. I just knew you had to be in there someplace. And then I heard you crying."

"Thank you," Cassie said.

"Oh, I wasn't looking for any credit. I just thought you might like to know how we knew where to find you."

The boy's high-pitched voice was getting to be too much for Arthur. "Have you finished playing your harmonica?" he asked. "Because if you have, how about us all getting a little sleep? I feel like I'm coming apart at the seams."

"Are we the only three?" Cassie asked.

Arthur wasn't going to answer her, but there was an odd, compelling tone in her voice, and besides, it was a deep, soft voice, a pleasant contrast to the boy's squeaking soprano. "No," he said, "there's another one. A little fat man. He's lying over there, just a few feet away. As a matter of fact, if we keep quiet for a second, you can hear him snoring."

"Oh yes, I remember him. He came down after I did. He had such a round face." She was silent for a moment, and then said, "I don't mean to keep you from sleeping, but would you answer one more question?"

Arthur knew what the question would be. "Why don't we get some sleep?" he answered abruptly.

She was not discouraged. "Do you think—" she began, "do you think this is something that's happened just here, in this station, or is it something that happened all . . . surely you know what I mean?"

Her voice no longer seemed pleasant to Arthur, and he wanted to paste his hand over her mouth. She had

come too close to his own thoughts, stirring them up again after he had worked so hard to quiet them. Why hadn't he shut her up before she had begun?

Thomas broke in with a tentative guess. "Maybe a gas pipe blew up or something."

"All right!" Arthur exploded, "it was a gas pipe! Are you satisfied now? What's all this concern over what's happened? What's happened has happened, and there's nothing we can do about it. Can't you let it go at that and go to sleep?"

He heard them stirring, but they remained silent. Good, he thought. He was sick of their talk, sick of their voices. He was tired, and now that his thoughts had been set free, he wanted quiet so that he could think.

CHAPTER 4

A THROBBING PAIN in the back of his head awakened him, and for a moment Carl Norman could not remember where he was. Then, as he tried to sit up, he felt a sharp pain in his leg, and he was reminded of what had happened. It hadn't been a nightmare after all. But what had happened? He tried to set the whole crazy thing straight in his mind, but he couldn't seem to find a place to begin. All he could remember was leaving Dotty's place and then coming down into the subway. He couldn't think why he should have come down into the subway in the first place. All these years he had done nothing but ride taxis. He had almost forgotten what it looked like down here. And then he recalled the scene in the station just before the explosions. There had been

a woman, a good-looking woman, too. He remembered wondering what she was doing there alone at that hour. And there had been that young soldier who had followed him down and had been whistling something. It was all so clear—as if it had happened just five minutes ago. Then came the explosions.

And now here he was, stretched out like a damn corpse. He tried to sit up again, but the pain tore at his leg. He fell back, breathing heavily, and sweat streamed down his face. And then suddenly, not knowing why, he had the feeling that his wallet was missing. He reached into his coat pocket and breathed a sigh of relief as his hand embraced the familiar smooth leather. It was a good wallet, genuine Morocco. Mona had paid over twenty dollars for it, and it was the only thing she had ever given him that had lasted. Poor Mona. She was probably frantic with worry by now. He could see her by the telephone, waiting for him to call from the office and then not waiting any longer and calling herself. Mrs. Porter, knowing exactly what to say, since this would not be the first time he had overstayed a "business" trip, would tell her, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Norman, but Mr. Norman hasn't called in yet. He's probably had bad train connections, but I expect he'll call any minute now to check on his morning appointments."

Mrs. Porter would lie for him, all right, but he was beginning to feel a little uneasy about her. Married women didn't like lying to other married women about their husbands. Maybe he would replace her with some

nice single girl, someone he could have a little fun with once in a while. No . . . no more of that; Dotty was enough to handle the way it was. But still he'd get rid of Mrs. Porter. She reminded him too much of Mona. She was even beginning to give him that same look, as if he were a little boy who had been doing something wrong behind the barn.

There wasn't a hell of a lot of light in the station, but there was enough so that he could make out the wreckage. One of those big steel beams was hanging dangerously loose just above his head. If they started digging up there, he thought, the vibrations might easily jar the beam loose and he'd be finished. But he didn't hear any digging upstairs, and he realized that he had been listening for it ever since he had awakened. They should have started on the rescue work by now. At this rate he would never get out. And then a thought occurred to him which made him feel sick: When they did get him out, how was he going to explain his being there to Mona? What possible excuse could he give for being caught in a subway in Uptown Manhattan when he should have been on his way home from Trenton?

He heard someone moving around behind him. It sounded like two or three people. That would be the soldier and maybe that woman. And then he recalled the face that had appeared above him after it had happened. Had it been the soldier? No, his was a boy's face. It had been a dark stubble and bruised cheekbones. He felt for his wallet again. And then he heard their voices. Men's

voices. Maybe the woman was dead, he thought sadly, and was mildly amused at his concern for someone he didn't even know. He wished he were lying facing them so that they could see he was awake. He wanted to call to them, but didn't know what to say first. Why should he have to think about what to say? He'd had nothing to drink, yet his mind was behaving as if he were hung-over. "Hey, there," he called hoarsely, "come over and sit me up, will you?"

One of the voices came toward him. The face which appeared above him was the one he remembered seeing when he had first regained consciousness. But the bruised cheekbones and the dark stubble were not the first things he noticed now. It was the eyes, and even in the dim light, they were the brightest blue Carl had ever seen. And somehow the voice, asking him how he felt, seemed softer than he remembered it.

Carl took a firm hold on his thoughts and answered, "I guess I'm O.K.—except for this leg."

"Want me to see if it's broken?"

"What's the difference if it is or isn't? All I know is it hurts like hell."

"If it isn't broken, maybe I can work it back in shape for you."

"O.K., go to it."

Arthur ran his hands lightly up and down the injured leg. He stopped his fingers at different spots along the leg and pressed them against the bone, looking up at Carl Norman to watch for a grimace of pain.

"Well, what's the verdict?" Carl asked. "Broken?"

"No, Norman, I don't think so."

Carl looked at him suspiciously. "How do you know my name?"

"You belong to Blue Cross, too."

Quickly, Carl reached into his pocket and inserted his fingers into the billfold of the wallet.

"Don't bother," Arthur said, smiling. "It's all there. Nobody touched a cent of it."

Carl withdrew his hand as casually as he could. "You see, it's not mine," he lied. "Money raised in the office for the widow of one of the men. Supposed to give it to her tomorrow."

Arthur rose and began to walk away.

"Don't leave me here like this!" Carl shouted after him. "Help me get up, will you?"

Arthur returned and raised him to a sitting position. Carl sighed. Sitting was better than lying. Now there was no tension in his leg, and in a few seconds most of the pain was gone and there was only a gentle, tolerable throbbing. He began to feel a lot better and called again to Arthur, who was walking away from him. "Can you turn me so that I'm facing you? Kind of lonely with nothing to look at but this garbage here."

Arthur returned and, without saying a word, pivoted him around until he was facing the others. "Thanks," Carl said. "That's more like it."

The woman was sitting up against one of the steel columns, smiling at him. Carl nodded and returned her smile.

He had been right about her being good-looking. Damn good-looking. "What's wrong with our friend over there?" he asked her, nodding toward the soldier who lay on his side against a mound of rubble. "Is he hurt or something?"

"No," the woman answered, "he's just sleeping."

"Say, what happened down here anyway?" Carl asked, looking first at the woman and then at the man who had helped him.

The woman's face went blank, and the man grunted and closed his eyes.

"What's the matter, did I say something wrong?"

The woman smiled again and said, "It seems to be a forbidden subject. But we can talk about anything else you like. I've got it. Why don't we talk about the Giants? How do you think they'll do this year?"

Carl stared at her and wondered what she was talking about.

* * *

Arthur tried to sink back into his thoughts, but Cassie and Carl Norman were talking too loud. Especially Norman. His voice was strong for someone who had been unconscious for so long. It was funny, he thought, how you immediately liked or disliked someone. First impressions. He should know better, after all these years of counting on them and then having them thrown back in his teeth. But just the same, there was something about Fatso he didn't like. And there was the woman. He

would have to give her credit for one thing: a lot of women would be screaming all over the place by now. If only she didn't talk so much. If only she didn't put on that phony cheerfulness. And the boy. His voice got on your nerves after a while and he played lousy harmonica, but he really wasn't so bad. And then suddenly he became irritated with his thoughts. Why was he wasting his time like this? It didn't matter one bit what he thought of them—or they of him. That was why he had come down here in the first place—to get away from all the Normans and Cassies and Thomases. It was because of them that he had come all the way up here to the end of the line, the perfect place to finish it off. And dammit, as soon as he found a way, that's what he would do. Finish it off!

He said it over and over again: Finish it off . . . finish it off . . .

But another voice said something different: "No thank you, dear God, no thank you." As a boy, he had always said that whenever a frightening thought had entered his head. He had said it when they'd thought his brother Stanley was going to die of diphtheria. He had said it every time he'd had that nightmare of himself drowning in deep black water. And now again, years later, he had said it again. But where had it come from? Why now of all times to recall a childish ritual? Why now call upon his childhood God? But then, he had been doing a lot of thinking about his childhood lately. Memories had been springing up and he had been unable to keep them

down. You can turn away from memories only when there is no room for them. Plenty of room in him. A lot of bitterness and sickness and weariness, but otherwise plenty of room in him. And when there was a lot of room in you, you couldn't be selective. Everything rushed in to fill up the empty corners. Every event that had made life hurt found its way in.

But there were the happy times, too. They didn't come back as often, but they came back. Like all those Christmases before Pop died. Sleigh rides, snow fights and steaming hot *kapusta* for him and his brothers. And setting up the tree, with a crucifix at the top instead of a star. There were always little toys along with the practical gloves, shirts, or underwear. One year he was given a small pencil sharpener in the shape of the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and he was never without it until finally he lost it in a San Francisco bar.

But the year of the big mine cave-in there were no presents for Christmas. And for Easter, no eggs to spare for hard-boiling. Eggs had to be saved for Pop, who lay stretched out on the couch in the kitchen. The company sent around a claims adjuster, and he gave Pop two hundred dollars. Mom took the money and put fifty dollars in the bank, and then had the rest changed into single dollar bills which she kept tied in a bandanna around her waist. The dollars were spent slowly and carefully, and even after they were gone and Mom had to depend only on what she could earn from occasional work at the silk mill, she did not touch the fifty dollars in the bank. Pop

could never understand why she saved the fifty dollars and ranted on about it almost continuously. Arthur had not understood why, either, until Pop's funeral, almost a year after the cave-in, when he saw the neat coffin and the cakes and wine for the visitors.

The year after the cave-in should have been a tragic memory, Arthur thought now, but actually it was one of the happiest years he could remember. Pop had plenty of time on his hands and spent most of it with his "boyce." He was no longer the man in soot-covered work clothes with the dirty face and hands who left the house with his dinner pail before they awoke and then returned only to eat his supper before going off to sleep. Lying on the couch in the kitchen, he looked clean and warm and kind, his pale, lean face resembling the Holy Saviour's on the calendar Benny the Baker had given them.

The nights were best. Pop would play for a while with plump little Joey, and then he would call for the chess set that had been given to him by his own father and they would begin to play. Those were nights of long, silent meditations before each important move. Cold nights of moving the couch closer to the kitchen stove and sipping tea out of glasses almost too hot to hold. Nights of long lectures on the finer points of chess, delivered in Pop's clumsy English, for though he couldn't write even his own name, Pop's chess was the marvel of the whole township. Once, even, an old priest, just arrived from the old country, had sought him out to play with him. And Pop had beaten him three out

of four. Arthur remembered how Mom had rebuked him for defeating a holy man. "Are you so sure of yourself that you can afford to make enemies in the Church?" she had scolded. "Have you no respect for an educated man?"

Pop had laughed and said in Polish, "But, Catherine, by defeating the priest, I have made sure that I will enter Paradise. Now he will make it his business to see that I go to heaven, so that when he gets there himself, he will have another chance to beat me."

Arthur found himself laughing aloud, and became aware of Cassie and Carl Norman staring at him. They looked at him as though they expected him to tell why he was laughing. But he felt they were prying, and stopped laughing suddenly.

Thomas awoke and began rubbing his eyes. "Did you hear any rescue work going on while I was sleeping?" he asked, yawning.

"No, we haven't heard a thing," Cassie answered mechanically, her eyes still on Arthur.

Arthur was sorry he had been so abrupt, and he forced a smile to his lips. This seemed to satisfy Cassie, and she turned away.

"Well, gee," Thomas continued, "you'd think they'd start on it by now. I'm getting pretty hungry."

"We're all hungry," Arthur said, although he had forgotten hunger, thinking that a good drink would be better than food. "So if we want to eat, I guess we'd better get busy digging."

"Suits me," Thomas said. "Where are the tools?"

Without answering, Arthur rose, walked to the edge of the platform, and let himself down into the track pit, where he had left the tools the night before. Thomas followed him and took the shovels and the spade as Arthur handed them up. Cassie came over as Arthur lifted himself out of the pit. "I want to help, too," she said. "You have enough tools, haven't you?"

Arthur was about to object when he caught her cool eyes straight on his. He handed her the spade, which was a little lighter than the shovels.

"Where do we start?" Thomas asked.

"I've been thinking about that," Arthur answered. "We could dig at those stairways for days and not make a dent in them. The junk would slide down from the top faster than we could ever dig it away. But there's one stairway down the platform that's fallen down completely. All that's left is a hole in the ceiling. If we build up the mound under the hole, one of us could get up to the next level by standing on somebody's shoulders. What do you think?"

"Sounds fine to me," Thomas said.

Cassie nodded her head and began to take off her shoes.

"You'd better leave them on," Arthur cautioned. "There's a lot of sharp stuff laying around."

"I can't move with them on. The heels keep sinking and getting caught in everything."

"Let me see one of them," Arthur said.

Taking the shoe she handed him, he placed it on the

platform and anchored the heel under his foot. Then he pulled at the body of the shoe until it came free of the heel. He flattened the nails against the platform. "There," he said, "that should do it. Now let me have the other one."

"That's wonderful, Art."

The short form of his name startled him. Somehow he had not expected her to use it. "Let's go," he said gruffly when he had fixed the second shoe and given it to her.

They started toward the fallen staircase when they heard Carl Norman calling to them. "What is it?" Arthur shouted back impatiently.

"You're not going to leave me here, are you? It's lonely here by myself."

Arthur looked at Thomas, shrugged his shoulders, and dropped his shovel. They went over to Carl and lifted him to his feet.

"I'm sorry I had to go and get hurt," Carl said, "because I'd like to help you fellows. But even though I can't, I don't want to be left back here. A fellow could go nuts sitting here alone."

"Sure, sure," Arthur said. "Now try to move your legs a little. Nothing's broken, so try to move them."

He did not try to move them, and they had to carry him all the way. Near the fallen staircase they sat him down against a column and Thomas went back for the shovels.

"You'd better get some action in those legs or they'll freeze up on you," Arthur warned.

But Carl's eyes were closed, and he didn't seem to hear. Sweat ran down his face and dropped to his chest, leaving tiny wet spots on the fine layer of dust on his coat. Arthur turned away and walked toward Cassie, who was already throwing pieces of tile on the mound.

It was tedious work. At first they haphazardly threw shovelsful of debris as high as they could onto the mound, but most of it slid back down the sides, making the mound wider at its base but not much higher. And then Cassie rested on the handle of her spade and surveyed their work. "Wouldn't it be better," she said, "if one of us got up on top of the mound, one of us perched himself about halfway up and the last man stayed down here? Then the one down here could hand his loaded shovel up to the second man, who could hand it to the top man, who could then place the rubble right on top of the mound."

With Arthur at the bottom, Thomas halfway up, and Cassie on the top, the work went easier and the mound grew fast. Arthur kept his eyes on Cassie's head as it moved closer and closer to the hole in the ceiling, and he tried to calculate how much longer it would be before the mound was high enough. Three, maybe four more hours. And then they'd be out. Thomas would fill his hungry stomach, but where would he fill his? Cassie and Norman would pick up their lives where they left off, but what would he do? And then suddenly he felt his chest fill up with a loathing for himself. He plunged his shovel into the rubble and lifted it to Thomas. But the

boy was not ready to take it. He was sitting on the slope of the mound, resting his forehead on his drawn up knees. Cassie was in almost the same position at the top of the mound. They had taken his pause as a signal to rest.

"Let's go!" Arthur snapped. "We've got to make use of this light while we've got it!"

Thomas and Cassie exchanged puzzled glances and lifted themselves to their feet. Thomas took the loaded shovel Arthur handed him and lifted it up to Cassie. "Boy, what a grouch," he whispered to her.

Arthur heard the remark, but ignored it. He brushed the sweat from his forehead and thrust his shovel into the rubble. He looked up at Cassie's head. Three or four more hours.

CHAPTER 5

THE LIGHT was gone again, and they sat around in a small circle, listening to Thomas's harmonica. Tonight "Oh! Susannah" and "Flow Gently Sweet Afton" were brisk and lively. Thomas was happy. And Arthur was feeling pretty good, too. The mound was finished. In the morning he would climb up through the hole and then, with some luck, up to the street level.

It seemed to have been understood all along that he would do the climbing. They hadn't even discussed it. When the mound looked high enough, Cassie had simply said, "I guess you can make it now, Art," and they had all nodded their heads in agreement. He wasn't sure now that he should be the one to go up. The second level should be in worse shape than this one, and they would

need someone who could get around, maybe do some fancy climbing to get up to the street. Maybe Thomas would be a better choice for the job. Soldiers were supposed to be in good physical condition. But Thomas looked soft. He would probably be no better at climbing than he was at playing the harmonica, Arthur thought, as he listened to "Susannah" for the third time. But neither Cassie nor Norman seemed to mind. What would they think if Burke was here with his music? They would want the night to never end, that's what they would think.

Then his irritation faded. Music was music, no matter how butchered up it was, and he was a sucker for it. Always had been. Like that time in Oklahoma when he hiked ten miles off the main highway to get to a county singing convention such as those Burke had told him so much about. And he was not disappointed—not at first anyway. There were hymns, rounds, folk songs, and an over-all air of warmth and good will that he had never seen in a crowd before. And best of all, he was able to feel a part of it. No one chased him, no one questioned him, and one old lady even gave him a root beer and some cinnamon doughnuts.

It hadn't been Burke's fault the way it ended; the old clown had told him that he would hear some real happy singing by some real happy folks, and he'd been right. Burke hadn't given him any guarantees that nothing would go wrong.

It happened right after the singing ended and the

people began to leave the grounds. It was ironic the way it happened. He was just beginning to think that maybe he would settle down in that part of the country—where people were warm and kind and smiled at you—when a heavy hand clamped down on his shoulder. He learned right then and there that even warm and smiling people hired sober-faced cops. It was the same old story! A wallet was missing, and immediately every tramp or stranger in the place was suspect. He was both tramp and stranger, and so he was taken to the county jail. He didn't mind the beating too much—he had learned to grit his teeth and count backwards from a thousand. It hurt, though, when the wallet was turned in by some kids who had been scavenging around the singing grounds and he was driven to the county line and booted out of the car without a single word of apology. "We don't like tramps around here," the sheriff had said, "and I got half a mind to hold you for vagrancy; but if you clear out of here quick, you're free to go. Just don't let me catch you in this county again."

Thomas had stopped playing, and now the only sounds Arthur could hear were the dripping water and Carl Norman's snoring. Although he knew he could expect nothing but "Susannah" and "Sweet Afton," he wished Thomas would begin to play again. He wanted the sound of music, no matter how bad, to remind him of Burke, to remind him of the little Armenian who had filled the barracks with the warm, pulsating chords of his long-stemmed guitar.

Even a jew's-harp made nice music. At least his brother Stanley's did. Stanley had had first pick at the grab bags, and he'd found the harp inside. You weren't supposed to find such a valuable prize in a penny grab bag, but every once in a while Schultzie, the storekeeper, would fix up a special bag so that word would get around and the other kids would come running. And although Arthur had found only a cheap balloon in his bag along with the usual stale candy, and little Joey, a small rubber eraser, they had been thrilled, for all together they had won one of the jackpot prizes. Sure, it had been Stanley's pick, but they were brothers, weren't they? Yet later, although Stanley had let Joey and him play the harp as much as they wanted to, they never seemed to be able to make it sound as nice as it did when Stanley himself played it.

But Mom had not liked the jew's-harp and finally had taken it from Stanley. "It's not real music," she had said when he begged to have it back. "Tonight you will hear *real* music."

This real music was in Hanover Park, the only music there had ever been in Mom's life. The municipal band held concerts on the mall every Wednesday night and Sunday afternoon from Decoration Day to Labor Day. It was a long walk and then a steaming, crowded trolley ride to Hanover Park, but Mom never missed a performance. The trolley fare was five cents each way, and though there never seemed to be enough money in the house, Mom always managed to scrape up twenty cents

somewhere—twenty cents because she had made a standing rule that at least one of the boys must go with her each time. Arthur remembered finding her weeping in the parlor one night after one of the concerts and asking her why she was crying. "Because all of you couldn't go with me tonight," she had told him. "It was beautiful tonight, it was like holy music tonight, and I wanted all my boys should hear it—not just Stanley, all of you. Twenty cents more for the trolley and all of you could have heard it."

It used to thrill Arthur, and puzzle him a little, to see the change that took place in Mom on the days of the concerts. They could always tell when they got up that it was a concert day, for Mom would be humming something downstairs and moving around faster than usual. And when they came downstairs, she would be smiling and laughing. She was a small woman, small and thin, with a long pale face, and you really couldn't say she was pretty. But on concert days something would happen to her face to change it so that it didn't look like the same face at all. A warm red light seemed to surround it, making it look round and soft, like a little girl's. And when she laughed, it was as if someone had told her the funniest story she had ever heard. Although Arthur and his brothers never fully understood why the concerts meant so much to Mom, they always laughed along with her, happy because twice a week she was changed into a wonderful new person.

When the spring came after Pop died, they expected

that Mom would not go to the concerts any more, but somehow, even though there was less money, twice a week she made the trip to the park. "Poppa told me that we should keep our music," she said to them, and after a while Arthur saw how wise Pop had been, for while the concert days were no longer filled with laughing and joking, they were a thousand times better than the days when there were no concerts. On those days Mom would not even leave her bed, and all day long they would hear her weeping. If it had not been for Big Mary, Mom's friend, they would have had no one to cook their meals; yet Big Mary had only made things worse—all the while she was in the house she would walk around shaking her head from side to side, saying over and over again, "Poor Catherine, poor Catherine," until they couldn't stand it any longer and would have to run out of the house.

And then one Wednesday morning, a concert day, they awoke and did not hear Mom downstairs. Later, as they were dressing, they heard the weeping. Arthur could remember exactly what Stanley had said: "But it's *Wednesday!*"

Two weeks and four concerts passed, and then one morning they awoke and saw the ambulance standing out front. They could hear Big Mary's voice in Mom's room and also the voices of some men. And then Mom began to moan, and soon they carried her out to the ambulance. When the ambulance was gone, Big Mary came up to their room and told them that Mom was being taken

away for a rest, that someday soon she would come back.

But somehow Arthur knew she would never come back. And he swore that he would do everything possible to keep Joey and Stanley from ever learning the truth. He was the oldest brother, and it was his job to look after them.

But he never thought he would be called upon so soon. It was the very day Mom was taken away. Joey and Stanley would not stop crying, so he made them go with him for a walk. They walked all over the township and everything was going fine—he even got them to laugh at a joke he told. But then, as they neared their house, Arthur saw a gang of kids standing on the far corner. Something inside him warned him to hurry Joey and Stanley into the house, but before he could speak, the gang saw them and began coming toward them.

"Your Ma's in the nuthouse!" they shouted at them. "Your Ma's in the boobyhatch!"

Joey and Stanley, their faces all wrinkled up, turned to him. But he didn't know what to do. It would be stupid to fight them—there were at least ten of them. And even if he could beat them up, what good would it do? The best thing to do, he thought, was to get away from them, get away so that Joey and Stanley wouldn't have to listen to what they were saying—and wonder if it were true.

"Come on," he said to his brothers, "let's go inside and

eat supper. Big Mary said she was cooking a ham for us, and we haven't had ham in a long time."

"Why are they saying that, Arty?" Joey asked, beginning to cry. "Who told them to say that?"

Arthur took Joey's arm and beckoned to Stanley. "Come on, Stahsh," he said, herding them through the gate.

Their house was exactly like every other coal-company house on the wide, unpaved street: an unpainted, rotting wooden box with a tar-paper roof. The only door was in the rear, facing the outhouse in the back yard. Inside were four dark, low-ceilinged rooms—the kitchen and parlor on the ground floor and two bedrooms upstairs, all smelling of cooked cabbage and burnt kerosene.

When they entered the kitchen, Big Mary was sitting at the table, waiting for them. "Where you been so long?" she asked irritably. "I've been waiting over an hour. The ham's all dried up."

"I'm sorry," Arthur said, "we were just walking around."

"Well hurry up and eat because I got someone coming to see me, and I want to be done with the dishes."

They sat down and began to eat. Arthur tried to lift the silence by telling a moron joke, but Joey and Stanley did not even look up at him. He had the feeling that they were avoiding looking at him. "What's the matter with you guys anyhow?" he asked.

"Never mind talking so much," Big Mary said. "I

wouldn't rush you so much, but this man will be here pretty soon, and I want to be cleaned up."

The man Big Mary was expecting came just as they started on the apples they were given for dessert.

"Finish them outside, kids," Big Mary said as she went to the door to let the man in. "And don't go too far from the house because I'll be wanting you."

She opened the door and greeted a tall thin man who carried a brief case. Joey and Stanley squeezed past the man and out through the doorway, but Arthur remained in the center of the room and looked steadily at the visitor. He had known they would send someone one of these days, but he had never thought it would be so soon. The man was smiling at him, but it didn't make a bit of difference to Arthur; he knew why the man had come, and all the smiles in the world couldn't change things from the way they were.

"Come on—you, too," Big Mary said to him. "Go on out and get some fresh air. You can use it. And keep Joey and Stanley with you."

He walked outside and was about to go around to the front of the house to look for the boys when he heard their voices coming from within the outhouse. He whistled their secret signal—one long and three short—but their voices went on in a steady hum. Going up to the door, he grasped the wooden lever, but their voices were clear now, and his fingers froze to the wood as he heard what they were saying:

". . . then he should've kicked their asses off!"

It was Stanley, and his voice trembled as if he were crying.

"He couldn't," Joey answered. "There were too many of them."

"I don't care if there was a million of them!"

Arthur pulled his hand from the lever. He could feel the anger filling up his chest, but he could also feel the burning on the back of his neck that always came whenever he did something he was ashamed of.

He turned and started toward the front of the house, but as he neared the kitchen door, it opened and Big Mary came out, mopping at her sweating arms. "Go get the kids and come on in," she said quietly.

Arthur felt himself stiffen all over, and he wanted to turn and run away, pretend that he hadn't heard her, but he knew it wasn't any use—she would only call him back.

"Go get the kids, I said," Big Mary said, raising her voice.

"Aw, why can't they stay out? What do you need *them* for? *I'll* come in with you."

"I need all of you. Now go get them and don't be smart!"

Arthur was hurt because of the way Big Mary had spoken to him, and the same knotty feeling he'd had in his throat when the ambulance came made it hard for him to swallow.

He went back to the outhouse and knocked on the

door. It opened slowly, and Joey stuck out his head. "What do you want?" he squeaked.

"Mary wants us in. Come on."

They came out of the outhouse, but refused to look up at him. He shrugged his shoulders and led them into the house. Big Mary was waiting for them just inside the door with a fat forefinger to her lips, warning them to be quiet. With her other hand she directed them into the parlor, patting them on their backs as they passed.

As Arthur walked into the room, he saw the man sitting in the large overstuffed chair Mom always used when she did her sewing. He was polishing his glasses. Arthur wondered if glasses could be worn out if you polished them too hard; if so, he thought, this man's glasses wouldn't last very long. The thought tickled him, and he began to giggle. Big Mary rushed over to him and jabbed her elbow into his ribs. "Keep still!" she hissed.

"Suppose you take seats, boys," the man said, smiling at them.

The three of them squeezed into the narrow love seat and stared at him.

"I'm terribly sorry about what's happened," he said slowly, "but we've got to make the best of it. Maybe I'd better start off by giving you all the facts, and then we'll go on from there . . ."

No, don't! Arthur screamed inside himself. They'll find out!

But the man went on and on, and all Arthur could do was sit there and listen.

". . . and she'll be well taken care of. Meanwhile, there's got to be someone to look after you. There are your two aunts in Carbondale. They've each agreed to take one of you. We don't like separating you, but that's the way it's got to be. It's best that the two youngest of you go to Carbondale, where at least you'll be together part of the time.

"As for you, son," he said to Arthur, "you'll have to stay here. This young lady and her mother have agreed to have you stay with them until you can get your working papers.

"Now I know how you feel, boys," he went on. "It's a terrible shock for you. But believe me when I say that it won't be as bad as it seems right now. And try to remember this: we don't like having to do this—it's just that someone has to look after you. It's all being done for your welfare."

He rose and picked up his brief case. "Will you have them packed and ready to go by eight in the morning?" he said to Big Mary.

When he had gone, Joey began to cry, and Stanley continued to stare at the empty chair. Arthur looked for Big Mary's eyes, but she had fastened them on the floral design in the center of the threadbare rug.

The mournful whistle of the seven-thirty cut through the silence in the warm, musty room, and Arthur heard a faraway voice, sounding much like his own, join in with the whistle, screaming, "No! No!"

And then he felt someone shaking him, and through

half-open eyelids, saw a sweating, red-faced giantess standing before him, her hands grasping his shoulders. "Stop it!" she was shouting at him, "stop it! Everything's going to be all right. Don't worry, everything's going to be all right!"

"He was only fooling, wasn't he, Mary?" Stanley pleaded.

"Now don't worry, kids," she boomed, trying to laugh. "Nobody's going to do anything wrong to my kids, don't worry. Not while I'm around."

"Then he was only fooling?" Stanley demanded.

"Well look, kids," she began backtracking slowly, "what the man said has got to be. Hell, you like your relatives, don't you? Just make believe you're going to see them like for Christmas or Easter."

"I'm not going without Arty," Joey sobbed.

Arthur looked at Big Mary and then at his brothers. He wanted to yell, "Let's go!" and run with them until they were miles away, until they got someplace where nobody could bother them. But he knew the idea was crazy. Where could they go? Where could three kids go?

"You've got to go, Joey," he finally said. "And you, too, Stahsh."

"Not without you!" Joey cried.

"Stop being a baby!" Arthur said, wishing he could make his voice sound as strong as he wanted it to. "Besides, who says I want to go with you? Maybe I don't."

Joey came over to him and wrapped his arms around his waist. "Arty," he sobbed, "I want to be with you."

"Don't, Joey," Arthur said, choking on the lump in his throat. "What do you want to cry for?" He pulled Joey's arms from around his waist. "What do you want to . . . cry for?" he sobbed as he ran from the room and from the house.

* * *

As the light slowly filtered into the station, Arthur watched the gray outlines growing out of the darkness, and he realized that the night had passed and that he had not once closed his eyes.

For some reason the light was dimmer than usual. A cloudy day outside, he thought, maybe rain. They would have to work fast if they wanted to avoid using the flashlights. He looked over at the others. Still asleep. Well, they've had enough, he thought, annoyed because they seemed to have gone to sleep easily, and then annoyed with himself for being so resentful. If he had a cigarette, maybe his nerves would stand still for a minute. He reached over and shook Thomas, who sat closest to him. "Wake up, Thomas," he said as pleasantly as he could. "We've got work to do."

Thomas opened his eyes and smiled at him. "I heard them upstairs last night," he said, stifling a yawn. "Did you hear them? They were digging for a while and then they stopped. I don't know why they stopped, but, boy, at least they're digging."

"I didn't hear anything last night. You must have been dreaming."

"No, I know when I'm dreaming or not. I tell you I heard them. Didn't you hear them either?" he asked Cassie, who had opened her eyes and was stretching her arms out before her.

"Who?"

"The rescue workers. You must have heard them."

"I . . . no, I don't think so."

"You see?" Arthur said. "Just a dream. We'd better forget about dreams and start working."

"I tell you I heard them. They were digging for about an hour."

Arthur was beginning to lose patience with the boy. "Look here, Thomas," he began slowly, "I don't know what you heard. Maybe it was digging and maybe it wasn't. But it seems to me that if there's going to be any digging, first there's got to be someone to do it. Now why don't we forget about it for a while and get to work?"

"That's the second time you said something like that, and I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, Art," Cassie said, "what did you mean?"

"Let's forget it! I don't know what I meant." He turned and walked a few steps away. When was he going to learn to keep his mouth shut? For all he knew, Thomas might have been right about hearing the digging. Maybe he had fallen asleep after all and only imagined he had stayed awake all night. "Have you got a cigarette?" he asked, turning back to Cassie.

"Only six left," she said, handing him one, "so perhaps we'd better go easy on them from now on."

"I've got three left in my pack," Thomas volunteered.

"How about you?" Arthur asked Carl. "Any left?"

"No, I've been out since yesterday."

"That makes nine," Cassie said. "Look, why don't we pool them and smoke them one at a time?"

All eyes turned to Thomas, who nodded his head solemnly.

"We'll start with this one," Arthur said, sucking at his cigarette. "A cigarette is good for about thirty drags. If we each take seven, it should come out about right."

They nodded their heads in agreement, and Arthur studiously sucked at the cigarette again. "I think that was my sixth," he said, releasing the smoke through his nostrils. As he placed the cigarette to his lips for the last time, he felt the others watching him anxiously. What were they worried about? He was the one who set the limit at seven, wasn't he? He passed the cigarette to Cassie and watched as it went from her to Thomas and then finally to Carl. He wanted to watch Carl handle the butt. He wanted to see how the big-fat-cigar type would manage with a down-and-out smoke. But Carl disappointed him. He took the butt in his fingers, held it to his lips, and sucked in the smoke contentedly. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

"How do you feel today, Norman?" Arthur asked. "Think you'll be able to move around?"

Carl sucked at the butt a last time and threw it aside. "I hope so," he said. "The leg still aches, but at least I got my wind back. If I weren't so hungry, I'd feel like trying anything now."

"Good," Cassie said. "We can help you around while Art's upstairs. All we can do is wait for him anyway."

"Well, let's go then," Arthur said, rising and going toward the mound. "Let's see what's up there."

He looked at the mound and thought that it could be a few feet higher. He would really have to use his arms to lift himself, and right now he felt that they were the weakest parts of his body. And the cigarette had made him dizzy. Maybe they should use another hour or so to build up the mound a little more.

"There isn't much light today, is there?" Thomas said, coming up behind him.

He was right, Arthur thought. And it seemed to grow dimmer every moment. The light might be gone entirely by the time they completed the additional work on the mound, and then they would have to wait another day to make the climb. Well, at least he would give it a try.

As they had worked on the mound, they had discussed in detail the best way to boost the climber up through the hole, so now they took their places on top of the mound as if they were a well-rehearsed acrobat team. Thomas squatted, and Arthur placed one foot on his shoulder while Cassie stood by to help balance him. Thomas gave the signal and strained to raise himself, but then collapsed with a groan before Arthur could even

get his other foot up. No one said a word, and they formed for another try. This time Thomas held out and Arthur got both feet on his shoulders. After a few shaky seconds, Thomas managed to straighten himself up, and Arthur found himself as close to the hole as he could get. He heard Cassie's sounds of encouragement, and although he could see that he had been right about the mound not being high enough, he jumped from Thomas's shoulders and reached up for the ragged edge of the hole. It was a mistake, he thought as he clutched the crumbling concrete; he would never make it. His arms were like lead, and he hadn't even begun to pull himself up. He could hear them shouting up at him, and their voices were like goads pricking him. Then suddenly he was lying on his stomach on the floor of the second level, gasping for breath. They were calling to him from below, and he pivoted on his stomach to look down at them. Cassie placed her fingers to her lips and blew him a kiss. Without thinking, he returned it.

"Throw up one of the flashlights and the spade," he said to Thomas, becoming consciously serious again. "It's not much lighter up here. Must be some hell of a day up there."

"Can you hear anything yet?" Thomas asked, throwing up the flashlight and then the spade. "You're closer now. Can you hear anything?"

"No, not a thing. But I'm nowhere near a street exit, and maybe that's why."

"What does it look like up there?" Cassie asked.

"Pretty much the same as down there, only worse. I'm going to have a look around."

He moved away from the hole and cast the beam of the flashlight ahead of him. It fell on the worst destruction he had ever seen, even worse than in Belgium during the war. There were places throughout the level where the ceiling had melted down onto the floor, leaving masses of rubble it would take a bulldozer to break through. And then he saw the small wet spots on the floor. It was raining, all right, he thought, but where in hell was it coming through?

As he climbed over one rubble heap after another, he became aware of the air for the first time. It was clearer, and occasionally a wisp of it brushed against his face. That was one of the things he had thought about before making the climb. Fresh air would mean large holes somewhere, and that was what he was looking for. But he couldn't see the holes anywhere. It was the damn rain. It might just as well have been night outside, it was so dark now.

He had reached what he thought should be the general location of an exit to the street, but he found no gates, no turnstiles, no sign of the change booth, only a dead end of rubble, starting at the ceiling and sloping down toward him. If this was the only way out, it would take a month to dig through.

He turned and went toward the opposite end of the level. As he passed the hole he'd come up through, he looked down. Thomas was helping Carl Norman hobble

around while Cassie sat against a column, holding the lighted flashlight for them. The stupid asses, he thought, burning up valuable light like that. And with no light they'd really be up a creek. He wanted to call down to them, tell them to stop wasting the light and get busy building up the mound some more, but to hell with them, he decided; why should he tell them what to do?

The other end of the level was the same. If rescue teams were not working to get them out and they had to do all the digging themselves, they would have a long stay. Standing motionless for a full five minutes, he strained his ears, but could hear nothing. "That kid must be loony," he said aloud. If they had been digging last night, why would they stop come morning? Rescue work doesn't stop because of a little rain. But then he stopped thinking about it. To continue would mean trying to come up with an answer of some kind, something he didn't have for himself, let alone for Thomas.

On his way back to the hole, he brushed against a telephone booth. He didn't know how he had missed it on his way over, but there it was, practically untouched. For a moment he was going to pass it by, but then an idea occurred to him. It was crazy, but there was just a chance. He dug into his pockets. He had had some money when he came down. He didn't know how much, but he'd had some. And then he found it. A nickel. He opened the door of the booth and then remembered. A dime. It cost a dime. On his way to the hole to get the money from one of the others, he thought how funny it

would be if he were alone and the telephone were in working order. He would never have known because he didn't have a lousy dime.

None of the others had any change. That was good, Arthur thought, looking down at their faces. They would have been stuck, too. Fatso, with over two hundred bucks in his wallet, wouldn't even have been able to buy himself a rotten telephone call. And then he thought of something and went back to the booth. There was just a chance—no sense in not following it up. He took the spade and swung it at the telephone box. The coin compartment jarred open after four more swings, and a few coins fell to the floor. He picked up a dime and dropped it into the coin slot. Actually, he hadn't expected the telephone to work, and was not disappointed when he heard nothing in the earpiece. Even if it had been working, he thought, the beating he had just given it with the spade had probably finished it off. It was a stupid thing to hope for in the first place. Just a waste of time. If those explosions could do what they did to the station, then, sure as hell, no telephone wires were going to be left intact. And even if the damn thing had worked, the thought haunted him, would there have been someone up there to answer? He quickly brushed this aside and returned to the edge of the hole. The circle of light from his flashlight framed the three squinting upturned faces. "No dice," he said before they had a chance to ask the question. "Deader than hell."

"Did you try the other booths?" Thomas asked. "There must be more than one."

"They're buried. This was the only one I found. Besides, it was stupid to think it would work."

"But you haven't told us what you found up there besides the phone," Cassie said. "Can we get out up there?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I've looked from end to end, and we're sealed up tight."

"What do we do now?" Carl asked, his voice quavering.

"First we get me down, then we'll think about it."

"What do you want to come down for?" Thomas asked incredulously.

"Because I can't do any good up here. I've got another idea."

"Look, Art, maybe he's right," Cassie said warily. "As long as you're up already, why don't we all try to get up there with you and then start digging?"

"We'll never get anywhere digging up here. It's sealed up tight, I tell you. We'd need dynamite to make a dent in it."

"Well then what else can we do?" she asked.

"Go Downtown through the tunnel. On to the next station. Maybe it hasn't been touched. Maybe we'll find it easier to get out of than this one."

Thomas was shaking his head. "That's sort of risky, ain't it?" he said. "How about the trains? We might get hit by one if we start walking through the tunnel."

"What in hell makes you think there are going to be any trains running?"

"What makes you think there ain't?"

"A sixth sense," Arthur said sarcastically, and then jumped down through the hole onto the mound.

"Maybe you shouldn't have done that, Art . . . until we decided," Cassie said hesitantly.

"I've already decided," he said, coming down from the mound. "If you want to come with me, O.K. If you want to wait for Thomas's rescue crews, that's O.K., too."

"I'm with you!" Carl Norman said, hobbling over to him.

"Don't get me wrong," Thomas said. "Maybe it's a good idea, but why can't we wait one more night? At least we know what it's like here. We don't know what there is in that tunnel. There *could* be trains, you know."

"For God's sake!" Arthur exploded. "Look, I'll show you," he said, lowering himself into the track pit. "Here's the third rail. If the juice is on, we'll have your trains to worry about. If not . . ." Slowly he began to move his hand under the guard that ran along the top of the rail.

"Art, no!" Cassie cried.

His hand hesitated a moment and then quickly clasped the rail. He stiffened momentarily, sighed deeply, and then removed his hand. "There," he said, turning back to them, "I knew it. Are you still worried about your trains, Thomas?"

"You shouldn't do things like that," Cassie said, shaking her head.

"Well, Thomas there needed a little convincing. Look, there's going to be nothing in that tunnel but tracks that will lead us the hell out of here. And I want to get out of here; I don't like being boxed in. So if you want to come, O.K. If not, I go without you."

"I'm with you," Carl repeated. "The sooner we get out, the better I'll like it. I'm so hungry, my stomach thinks my throat's been cut. It keeps hollering, 'Hey, Carl, shove something down!' "

No one laughed.

"But what if the tunnel is blocked up, too?" Cassie asked.

"The worst we can do is come back here," Arthur replied. "Look, it's not getting any earlier. Are you coming?"

Cassie picked up her purse and came to the edge of the track pit. "Let's go then," she said.

As Arthur helped her down, her cheek brushed against his forehead and he quickly dropped her to her feet. Smiling, she turned and walked into the shadows. When he had gotten Carl down, Arthur turned to look for Cassie and saw her bending over, straightening the seam in one of her stockings. He turned away and saw that Carl and Thomas were watching her, too. Goddammit, he fumed, what was she trying to do? What was she, anyway? And then he remembered the thought that had passed through his mind when he had first heard her heels on the station platform, and he nodded his head knowingly. "Let's go!" he called to her impatiently.

She emerged from the shadows and came over to him, her eyes directly on his, as if she knew his thoughts. He turned abruptly and started down the tracks. Why did he suddenly feel ashamed of what he'd been thinking? He had the feeling that she was staring at his back, but when he turned, he saw that he was wrong. She was holding on to Thomas's arm, and her eyes were set on the crossties under her feet. He decided to forget about her and concentrate on getting through the tunnel. With all this junk in their way, it wasn't going to be easy.

As they passed the tool house in the tunnel, it occurred to him that they were going Downtown on the Uptown tracks.

CHAPTER 6

ARTHUR PLAYED his flashlight over the 200th Street station. It was in ruins. With each step through the tunnel from 207th Street, the wreckage had become worse. It had taken them three hours to push through a distance the train covered in two minutes. This station was closer to the surface than 207th Street and had received the full impact of whatever had blasted down on them. They would never get out here; they would have to move on. Perhaps it would be better in the next station.

But he would not be the one to make the suggestion, Arthur decided. Let it come from one of them. As it was, they were probably blaming him for making this move.

But none of them had spoken since they had entered the station.

"Well, what do you think?" Arthur ventured finally.

"It's terrible," Cassie said. "Somehow I'd felt that everything would be all right here, that we'd just walk up the stairs and out. Do you think it gets worse the farther Downtown you go?"

"I don't know. It's hard to say. Maybe the next station will be clear and maybe it won't. It's supposed to be one of the deepest in the city."

"You mean you think we should go down there?" Carl asked.

"No, I didn't say that. Don't put words in my mouth, dammit! I just said maybe it will be clear."

"Well, I'm willing to have a look," Cassie said. "Anything would be better than this."

"Christ!" Thomas blurted, "you folks make it sound like this is something that happened all up and down the subway line."

"Maybe it is, Thomas," Arthur said quietly. "Maybe it is."

"There you go again. One minute you say it'll be better Downtown, and then the next minute you say something like that. You give a guy the creeps."

"Art may be right," Cassie said hoarsely. "This thing might be more serious than we think. It might be what everybody's been afraid of for so long," she added, breaking into ragged weeping.

Arthur went to her and placed his hand on her shoulder. "Come on, Cassie, snap out of it. I've been patting

you on the back all this time because you've held up so well. Keep it up. It won't be long before we're out."

Cassie looked up at him, this man with his hand on her shoulder—someone she would have ignored had she passed him on the street—and said softly, "I'm sorry, Art, I couldn't help it. When I thought of what this might . . . forget it," she said, raising her chin and taking a deep breath. "No more tears. Not now, anyway."

"Shall we move on then?" Arthur said.

Carl groaned. "Do we have to? Why can't we just settle down here for a while? I'm bushed. Honest, I can't move another step."

"Me neither," Thomas chimed in. "This is worse than basic training."

"O.K.," Arthur said, "I guess we'll be as comfortable here as anywhere, and we'll get a fresh start tomorrow."

Carl lowered himself awkwardly to a sitting position. "Boy, I sure am hungry," he said.

"Well, if you'll wait a few minutes," Arthur said, flashing the light along the platform, "I think I can fix that for you. There should be something to eat in that busted newsstand up there. And probably some cigarettes, too."

"So help me God, I never would have thought of it," Carl said, sounding as if he were going to burst into tears. "Why, I would have starved to death before I would have thought of it. Why in hell didn't we think of looking for the newsstand in the other station? What fools we were!"

"There wasn't one there," Arthur said. "I looked, but

couldn't find one. Come on," he said to Thomas, "let's get at it."

As they waded through the debris, Arthur stumbled over an extended arm. It belonged to a man in work clothes. He might have been going home from the night shift, Arthur thought, or maybe he was a subway worker. And then he thought again of the subway workers back at 207th Street. He should have spent more time looking for them. But they had probably been killed; if they had been alive, he would have heard them, just as he had heard Carl Norman and Thomas. He stepped over the man and moved on toward the newsstand. There were more arms and legs sticking out of the rubble piles, and he wondered how many of their owners had died suddenly and how many had lingered on. Perhaps some of them were still alive, waiting for help to come. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, "Hello! Anybody here?"

There was no answer except from Carl Norman, who misunderstood and sang back, "We're O.K.!"

"Stupid sonofabitch," Arthur muttered.

"Will you look at this stuff!" Thomas cried. "Christ Almighty, I've never seen so much candy laying around for free in my whole life. Look—Mounds, Planters Peanuts, and Nabs."

"Forget the peanuts. Too salty. We've been drinking too much of the rotten water down here already. Christ, my tongue is hanging out for a good drink right now."

Thomas glanced up at him, and Arthur immediately interpreted the look on his face. "Yes, I mean water. I've been known to taste it now and then." He turned away from Thomas and reached through the broken glass and twisted wire mesh for the cigarettes which were spilled all over the stainless steel counter. He stuffed the packages into his pockets and picked up a carton of book matches. As he turned to go, his light fell on a box of cigars. Why not let Fatso have a treat, too? he thought. He stuffed four cigars in his pocket and turned to Thomas. "Have you got all we need?" he asked.

"Sure, plenty," Thomas replied with a stuffed mouth. "Try one of these," he added, holding out a marshmallow bar. "Best candy I ever tasted. It's funny, my Mom never used to like me to eat too much candy because it'd ruin my meals. Wait till I tell her how now it is my meals."

"Where's your home, Thomas?"

"Sioux Falls—and why don't you call me Bob?"

"We'd better get back to the others now. Here, hold the light and I'll carry the candy."

"Say, did you get that field jacket you're wearing in the Army?" Thomas asked.

"Yes. Hold that light steady, will you?"

"Were you in the infantry? My brother was in the infantry."

Arthur was sorry he had started the conversation. Now the inevitable questions would follow—what division? any action? wounded? But Thomas stumbled over a wrecked bench and the rest of the way back to the track

pit he was too concerned with a bruised knee to ask any further questions.

Carl Norman was sitting with his hands folded in his lap, as if he had been told that he wouldn't get any candy unless he sat quietly. Arthur wished he could get his feelings straight about this guy. It became too damn complicated when you disliked someone and didn't know why and then felt guilty because he seemed human after all. Well, to hell with them all. In a day or two they'd be out and he'd have nothing more to do with them.

The candy went fast. They formed a small circle, piling the boxes of candy in the center, and began to eat the bars as fast as they could tear off the wrappers. The crackling paper and tinfoil was the most cheerful sound Arthur had heard in years.

"Better take it easy on these," he cautioned, putting aside an unfinished Peanut Chew. "They make you thirsty as hell."

The others said nothing, but kept on eating and tearing open new packages. He had shot his mouth off again, telling them what to do when he didn't give a damn what they did. He lit a cigarette, rose to his feet, and followed the tracks into the tunnel. When he had walked about fifty feet, he stumbled onto what seemed to be a solid wall of debris spread across the tracks. They would probably be able to climb over it, he thought, but right now he wasn't going anywhere, so why bother? He sat down and stretched back against the rubble. He was tired, and it felt good to close his eyes. Maybe now he would be

able to fall asleep. He was away from the others, so maybe he would be able to stop thinking about them for a while. He wouldn't think about what had happened either, or about what he was going to do. He would just sit there and think about nothing at all.

Nothing? But how did you think about nothing? When you tried it, you discovered that you had less control over your thoughts than you had imagined. When a thought came, you could turn it away, but a second later another would be there to take its place. It, too, could be turned away, but since one thought can be rejected only by displacing it with another, suddenly you were caught; you had started the procession, and you could do nothing but sit there and watch it go by.

Cassie, Thomas, and Carl were at the head of the procession, and Arthur hurried them by; they had already taken up too much time in his thoughts. And they made him think too much of the present . . . and the future. It was better to think of the past. In the past all the questions had already been answered, all the problems solved. There was Mom and Pop he could think of. And Joey and Stanley. And Big Mary. No, not Big Mary. That was a mistake. Back to Joey and Stanley. What had become of them? Where were they now? The last he had heard, they each had four kids. Little Joey with four kids. It seemed so funny. Joey who had cried so easily.

Big Mary. She stood before him as large as she had been in real life. He could almost smell her sour sweat and

feel her big flabby arms around him. Arthur shuddered and tried to think of something else. He was still not far enough away from what had happened. Maybe someday he would be able to entirely forget that part of his memory of Big Mary and remember only the good part—remember the big fat lovable Mary who had made a home for him when there was no place for him to go.

He sat up and lit another cigarette, but this pushed her away for only a moment. She was back, smiling at him, and he forced himself to return her smile. He had to do his best to please her or she would go off on one of her tantrums, the tantrums that came so often after her mother died.

While the old lady was alive, things couldn't have been better. It was like having two mothers instead of one, the way they treated him. It was as if he were of their own flesh and blood. The change in Mary came about a week after the old lady's funeral. "Never leave me, Arty," she said to him. "I'm all alone now and I need you." And from then on it was like being smothered by a big overstuffed pillow. She wouldn't let him out of her sight. She was there, waiting for him, when he got out of school. She was at the window, watching him, when he played out in the street. She was in his room after he had gone to bed, standing in the dark and watching him as he pretended to be asleep.

Once he nearly escaped. Uncle Alec in Carbondale sent word that he could come live with them provided he

got his working papers and paid for his keep. But Mary threatened to kill herself if he left, and so he stayed on; he could not forget the debt he owed her.

Staying on was a terrible mistake. But how could he have known things would turn out as they did? How could he have known that something had happened to Mary's mind? When the danger signs first appeared, he refused to see them. They made him sick to think about, and he was ashamed of what he felt were his own dirty thoughts. When Mary too often walked into his room while he was dressing, he tried to find some logical reason for her doing so. When she called him into her room all those times to send him on fake errands, and he saw her lying there on her bed wearing only a silk nightgown, he fought to convince himself that the errands were not fake.

Up to the last minute on that last night he tried to fight off the thoughts that haunted him. But when she gave him the whisky, he realized that he couldn't deceive himself any longer. It was the night of his birthday. He had just gotten into bed when she came into his room, dressed only in her nightgown. "We've got to drink a toast," she said thickly, pushing a half-empty bottle at him. "You're a man now!"

Arthur sighed and closed his eyes. He wondered what had become of Mary. What had gone through her mind that morning when she had awakened and found him gone? What had she done?

Poor Mary, he thought, shaking his head slowly. Poor

Mary who had had such a wonderful way of laughing. Mary who had loved them all so much. Why can't I remember you only that way, Mary, and forget about all the rest?

His cigarette had gone out, and he took another. As he struck a match, he heard someone coming through the tunnel and held the flame out before him.

"That's a relief!" It was Cassie's voice. "I hope I can make it before you burn your fingers."

"I've got plenty of matches."

She walked into the wavering circle of light, and Arthur caught the strange expression on her face before the flame died. He had seen it before when she had blown him that kiss back in the last station.

"I had to get away from 'Susannah,' too," she said, "or I'd go out of my mind. Is that why you left? Because you knew he'd pull out that harmonica again?"

"I like the harmonica when it's played right, but that's not why I came here. I need a little solitude once in a while."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she began, and he heard her move, "I didn't think I'd be intruding."

"It's all right," Arthur said quietly. "I didn't mean it that way. Stay if you want to. Have a smoke?"

"Yes, thank you. I left mine back there."

He lit the cigarette for her and studied her face in the light. It had changed a great deal since he had found her in the tunnel. Her lips seemed thinner then, and her skin had a cold, pasty look. Now there was some color in her

face, and the little lines at the corners of her mouth had disappeared. If he had to guess her age now, he would deduct a few years from his original estimate.

He heard her sigh as she sat down beside him, and he turned to look at her. Only the end of her cigarette was visible in the darkness. "He does play a pretty lousy harmonica, doesn't he?" he said to her.

"Yes, but don't tell him, Art. It would break his heart. He thinks he's keeping up our morale by playing."

The end of her cigarette disappeared, and he heard her move again. For a moment he thought she might be returning to the others, but then he felt her next to him.

"Art," she began in a whisper, "are we ever going to get out of here?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I've got a funny feeling about all this. Usually I can talk myself out of anything, but suddenly I realized that I haven't even been trying this time. I've just been accepting it and not even thinking about the future, as if this were the only future."

"I wouldn't let the others hear you talk this way. They've got their minds set on us getting out, and they really believe we will."

"Do you, Art? Will we get out?"

"I don't know. But even if we do, there's still a bigger question to be answered—will there be something worth getting out for?"

"It's odd that you should say that, because I've been thinking the same thing. I don't think there will be.

Maybe because I'm one of the persons this is happening to. That sounds crazy, doesn't it? Did you ever ride along on a highway and have the lights go off in a house along the way just as you came up to it? It's happened to everyone now and then, but it happens to me over and over again. Street lights, theater marquees, oh, anything. Once I needed gas on the road. I saw the lights of a station ahead of me and I drove up to it. But just as I pulled up, all the lights in the place went off. I got out of the car and tried to catch the attendant before he left, but there wasn't anyone there. The place looked as if it had been deserted for hours.

"After something like that you begin to wonder. You wonder if there's something wrong with you. You wonder if things actually wait for you to come by before going off. Of course they don't, but you can see how a person would come to think they do. At first I was scared to death. I was afraid to leave my apartment. But then gradually I became used to it, and so when it happens now, I don't even think about it."

"Is that why you expect to find nothing upstairs—" Arthur asked, "expect to find that the world has been turned off because you came up to look at it?"

"That's close enough, I guess."

CHAPTER 7

THEY WERE still sleeping, and it seemed to Thomas that they would never wake up. He hadn't been able to sleep more than a few winks all night, and for the past hour or so he had been sitting up, watching the light come in from the upper level.

Suddenly Cassie stirred, and he caught his breath and held it. You couldn't wake up a person by thinking of them, could you? Her eyes were open now, but when she turned to look at him, it was only for a brief second, as if checking to see if he were there and nothing else. No "Good morning," no hint of what had happened last night, no nothing. Dammit! he swore to himself, and it had started out to be such a good night, with finding the candy and all. Why couldn't he have gone right to sleep?

Then when she came back from the tunnel, he wouldn't have seen her and he wouldn't have gone over to her. It served him right for trying to be helpful to people who didn't appreciate it. If you saw a woman crying, it was only natural to go over and ask what was the matter, wasn't it? Sure, he'd put his arm around her, so what? He'd done it because he thought it would make her feel better. But the next thing he knew she had pushed him away. "Leave me alone," she said. Just like that. As if the only reason he'd gone over to her was to bother her.

It would have been different if it had been Art who had gone over to her. Or even Carl. They were older than him, so it would have been just fine. It didn't matter that all you were trying to do was be helpful. As long as you were young, you were a nuisance and people chased you away.

Why didn't people wise up? If you were old enough to wear a uniform, you were old enough to be treated like a man. But he had never been old enough for anything. Like the last war. His brother Ralph had been in and had even won a Silver Star. And when Ralph was discharged, practically the whole population of Sioux Falls came around to the diner to welcome him back, while he had to push blue plate dinners across the counter as if he were one of the hired help.

But he had nothing against Ralph. In fact, if it hadn't been for Ralph, he'd probably be knocking himself out in some crummy chemistry lab. Mom had had it all planned out for him: after high school he was to go to

college and then to a school of pharmacy. Uncle Jeff, the druggist, was going to help put him through, provided he would come back and work in the drugstore with him after he graduated. But he hated even the smell of the drugstore. It always reminded him of the time before Dad died when he'd had to go day after day for the endless prescriptions. But you couldn't say that was why you didn't want to be a druggist. They would laugh at you and point out how rich Uncle Jeff got just from peddling pills.

That was why he had gotten Ralph to talk Mom into letting him join up. Maybe by the time he got out, it would be too late to start studying pharmacy. Maybe by then they'd realize that he was old enough to make up his own mind about what he wanted to do.

He rose and stretched his arms wide. Yawning, he went over to Carl Norman, who was propped up against the wall of the track pit, and looked down at him. He was the sleepingest old guy he had ever seen. But at least he didn't give a guy a pain in the neck, the way the other two did. Then he noted that Carl's snoring had stopped and had been replaced by a funny choking sound, the kind a man makes when he's got a fish bone in his throat.

"Hey!" he cried, picking up the spare flashlight. "There's something wrong with Carl! He's having some kind of attack," he said to Arthur, who came running over.

Carl's face was the color of paste, his lips were drawn

tight, and there was a twitch in one of his cheeks. Arthur knelt beside him and began to massage his tense hands.

"Maybe we'd better put him on his back," Thomas suggested. "In first aid you almost always put them on their backs."

"Give me a hand then, quick!"

They moved Carl away from the wall and stretched him out on his back.

"We'd better take his shoes off and his belt," Thomas said. "They may be stopping the circulation."

But then Carl opened his eyes. He wanted to sit up; he could hardly breathe lying down.

"What was it, Carl?" Cassie asked. "What happened?"

Carl stared ahead of him for a long time, breathing rapidly and rocking back and forth. Clutching his chest, he began to weep. "It's my heart," he moaned. "I'm going to die. I can feel it. I'm going to die."

"But don't you have any pills or anything?" Cassie asked.

"No!" he moaned. "Oh, my arm, it aches terribly."

"Take it easy," Arthur said. "Try to go back to sleep."

Carl closed his eyes, but did not fall asleep; his lips continued to move in low, mournful mutterings. They sat watching him for a long time, keeping their eyes on his heaving chest. Finally, after an hour or so, he settled down into normal breathing and opened his eyes.

Arthur leaned forward and said, "Do you think you can go on?"

"Of course he can't!" Cassie said. "Do you want him to kill himself?"

Carl was embarrassed and looked from one to the other a few times before answering. "I sure want to go on, but, Christ, I feel all washed out. Can you wait a couple more hours?"

"I meant in a couple of hours," Arthur said. "Only the sooner we get out of here, the sooner you get to see a doctor and have that ticker looked at."

"Yes, I guess he's right," Carl said to Cassie. "Maybe it's all clear in the next station and we'll be able to walk right out. Then I could see a doctor right away."

Arthur pondered for a minute on the logic behind Carl's statement. If it were clear in the next station, why didn't the rescue workers come down through there to get them? Certainly someone would have thought of it, that is, if there really were rescue workers—or anyone, for that matter. But he didn't argue with Carl. He didn't like being the only one, except maybe Cassie, who suspected what had happened.

He wished he were in this alone. It was the others who made things seem complicated. Alone, it wouldn't be necessary to search for answers to questions he didn't understand. He would be the only one who didn't understand, and he had already learned to live from day to day. He would get away from the others somehow. No, not completely, they would need each other for the rest of the journey, but in spirit, yes. No more questions and

answers, no more theories, no more decisions. Let them turn to themselves.

All three were staring at him dumbly, and he wondered if he had been moving his lips as he sometimes did during these solitary debates. "I've been thinking," he finally said, "and if you're right about the next station, Norman, there's no sense in you coming along in your condition. You sit tight and when we get help, we'll come back for you and bring a doctor."

"No!" Carl shouted. "Don't leave me behind! I might have another attack. Wait a couple more hours and I'll be able to make it. I don't want to be left here alone."

"Why don't I stay with him?" Cassie said, as if she were a pleading mother confronting a stern father. "It isn't right to leave him alone."

How did he fall into these traps? Arthur wondered. And just a few seconds after he had resolved to make no more decisions for them. But then who would? The wet-eared boy? Cassie? Carl, who was afraid to be left alone? They would never get out.

Cassie was waiting for a decision.

"Sure," Arthur said to her. "Stay with him if you like. O.K. with you, Norman?"

Carl, who had begun to sweat, nodded his head eagerly and looked up at Cassie as if he were going to cry.

"Not bad," Thomas said insinuatingly.

"What do you mean by that?" Cassie asked sharply.

"Nothing," Thomas answered quietly, looking down

at his shoes. "Just kidding around." He wanted to pick up a stone and hit her with it.

"Wait about three hours," Arthur said to Carl. "That should give us plenty of time to get back with help if there's any to be had. If we're not back by then, you'd better start coming. We'll wait for you before we go on. O.K.?"

"Sure, sure, but I've been thinking—maybe it would be better if Bobbie stayed with me instead. I don't mean to be ungrateful, Cassie," he said to her, flushing, "but I may need some help getting through."

"I can manage!" Cassie said, turning away from them and beginning to rummage in her purse. "I'm staying!"

"O.K., fine," Arthur said. "Let's go, Thomas. Leave them one of the flashlights and fill up your pockets with some of that candy. And don't forget," he said to Carl, "if we're not back in about three hours, start moving, because we'll be waiting for you."

He beckoned to Thomas, turned, and started down the tracks.

CHAPTER 8

ARTHUR PROJECTED the beam of the flashlight into the 190th Street station and ran it up one of the tiled walls to the arched ceiling and down the other side. He and Thomas released their breath in a sigh of relief; the train level of the station was practically undamaged.

"This is it!" Thomas said gleefully. "We'll be able to get out here!"

Maybe Carl had been right, Arthur thought. Maybe all they would have to do now was to walk up those stairs.

"Think there's anybody here?" Thomas asked. "Maybe we ought to call out. Hey! Anybody here?"

The sharp echo startled them.

"Shall I do it again?" Thomas asked.

"Look," Arthur replied, pointing to the hunched figure

which seemed to have arisen from nowhere and was now limping toward them.

Arthur had seen the man even before Thomas had called out, but he had wanted Thomas to do it anyway. Sometimes shadows disappeared when you made a loud enough noise. Hadn't he chased away many shadows that way? But this was a man. A very old man in dirty rags. Although he was walking directly toward them, his head was bent forward, and they could not see his face. Arthur wanted to turn and run back into the tunnel; he didn't want to meet this man. It was too much like meeting himself.

The old man was standing in front of them now, but he kept his head lowered and said nothing. Arthur felt his own head dropping forward and quickly jerked it back. "Are you alone, mister?" he asked.

The old man raised his head slowly, and Arthur saw a long narrow face which was wrinkled in a warped smile. His eyes were runny and red and, though they were set on Arthur, seemed to be seeing nothing. He opened his mouth, and Arthur saw that two front teeth were missing. As he spoke, his breath came in short, labored gasps. "They said you'd be coming," he began slowly. "I told them they were crazy, that there was nobody left to come. But they were right, because dammit if you ain't here."

"Who's they?" Thomas burst out. "Is someone else with you?"

"Over yonder," the old man said, pointing toward the

far end of the station. "There's only three of us left: me, the reverend, and the cabbie. Wait till they hear I been the first to see you. Specially after I kept telling them you'd never come. Probably want to leave me down here for spite."

Arthur started down the tracks toward the center of the station. He wondered why the others hadn't heard them, and was about to call out when he heard the sound of running footsteps. He turned the flashlight toward the far end of the station and saw two men coming toward him. When they reached him, one of the men stopped at the edge of the platform, stared straight up at the ceiling and shouted, "Merciful Lord! Merciful Lord!"

But the other man did not stop. Without breaking his run, he leaped straight into the track pit and fell in a heap at Arthur's feet. Thomas came running up to Arthur and helped him lift the limp, sobbing man to his feet. "I thought," the man gasped through his sobbing, "I thought we would die down here. Thank God you're here. Thank God."

The man on the platform let himself down into the track pit. "I knew you'd come," he said, coming up to Arthur and placing both hands on his shoulders. "I was certain Mr. Geroux would get out and send help. You must never lose hope. You must never doubt. Let this serve as an example of the Lord's beneficence."

Arthur had the feeling that they were all expected to say "Amen." This would be the reverend the old man had spoken of. There was no way to tell from his dress,

except maybe the tiny gold cross that shone on his lapel in the light of the flashlight. But Arthur had seen these crosses worn by many laymen. He wore an ordinary business suit and no clerical collar. There was nothing you could tell from his face either. It wasn't handsome, nor was it unpleasant. It had a clean look about it in spite of a light stubble on his rounded jaw. It was difficult to look long at his intense dark eyes, which were set back deep under arched eyebrows. Especially now, Arthur thought as they darted quickly from him to Thomas and back to him again. More to stop the minister's eyes than anything else, Arthur said, "I'm sorry, sir, but no one sent us. We're in the same boat you are. We just happened to be farther Uptown and came down through the tunnel, thinking it would be easier to get out here."

The minister's mouth sprang open, and the other man, who was the cabbie, suddenly stopped his sobbing.

"I know how you feel," Arthur continued. "We're as disappointed as you. We thought we'd be able to walk right upstairs. Obviously we can't. But yet there doesn't seem to be too much damage here. Maybe with us to help, we'll find some way of getting out after all."

"But where is Mr. Geroux?" the minister asked of no one in particular. "He promised to send help."

"Who's Geroux?" Arthur asked. "And what makes you think he got out? How did he do it?"

"You mean Frenchie didn't send you?" a hoarse voice said from a few feet away. Arthur turned the flashlight

on the old man who had met them at the tunnel. He had almost forgotten about him.

"Mr. Geroux is a French waiter," the minister said, ignoring the old man. "He is a very strong fellow. We found the elevator shaft up on the next level and he volunteered to climb up it. He promised to send help if he got to the surface. You're quite sure he didn't send you?"

The cabbie sighed loudly, went to the side of the track pit, and leaned heavily against the edge of the platform.

"Look, gents," Arthur said, fighting an impulse to swear, "we're sorry if we're not what you've been expecting, but you're not exactly what we hoped for either!"

The minister had removed his hands from Arthur's shoulders, but now he replaced them. "You're right, my son," he said quietly. "I'm sorry. I've allowed doubt to cloud my mind again. With the two of you to help, we *will* find our way out of here."

"Don't see how," the old man rasped. "Frenchie was stronger than the two of them put together, and it didn't help us none."

"Mr. Britt," the minister said icily, "we're becoming a little impatient with your pessimism. In my experience I have found that defeatism leads only to defeat. Why, you sound almost pleased that Mr. Geroux hasn't sent help yet."

"Me pleased? Don't make me laugh!" The old man straightened up stiffly and groaned. His hands were

pressed against his back and his eyes were squeezed closed. In a few seconds he relaxed his body, sighed deeply, and continued. "I'm sad," he said, "plenty sad—for Frenchie! He wouldn't have tried it if you hadn't egged him on. He'd be here now—safe!"

"Why do you say 'safe'?" Arthur asked.

The old man answered in a quiet, calm voice, and Arthur had the feeling that he was speaking only to him. "Because even if he did get out, he didn't find anything up there worth getting out for."

"There's a great deal to get out for!" the minister interrupted.

"Don't bet on it," Britt said, unruffled, but now raising his voice for all to hear. "That level up there"—swinging his arm toward one of the stairways—"is wrecked to hell. I was coming down the stairs when it happened and got hit with something that almost broke my back. Listen, anything that could have done what it done up there must have knocked hell out of the streets. I don't know what it was. Maybe the goddam bombs they were always talking about. Maybe something else, I don't know. But one thing for sure, the streets ain't no place to be. The best place to be is right down here."

"Complete foolishness!" the minister cut in sharply. "Why do you insist upon discussing something you don't understand?"

"I'll talk about what I want to!" the old man shouted, breaking into a spasm of coughing. When he finally stopped, he was pale and short of breath. "Come over

here, son," he whispered to Arthur, walking away from the group. "Want to talk to you alone."

Arthur followed the old man, who said nothing for a long time. Finally, when he caught his breath, he said in a whisper, "Listen, son, I'm an old man and it doesn't matter what happens to me, so I'm telling you this for your own good. Don't let him tell you what to do. We wanted to try the tunnel like you did, but he kept yapping about trying to climb out through the shaft and the upper levels. He ain't volunteered to do any of the climbing, though. All he's interested in is collecting his damn bodies."

"What do you mean?"

"You heard me—bodies. There were some people upstairs when it happened. They were all killed or else hurt so bad they died a couple of hours later. Well, all he's been doing is digging around up there collecting their bodies."

"But why?"

"Don't ask me. He says it's the decent thing to do. We wanted to go through the tunnel, but no, he says we should try climbing up; and then once Frenchie got started up, he goes back to digging for the dead."

Arthur turned to look at the minister. He was sitting on one of the track rails, speaking to Thomas, who sat beside him. He was smiling as he spoke, but now and then his smile faded and he paused mid-sentence to raise his eyes to the ceiling, as if he were listening for something.

"Did this Frenchie really get up the shaft?" Arthur asked, turning back to the old man.

"I don't know for sure. It's a pretty deep shaft, and then he had another level to go before he'd reach the street. You can place your bet now on whether he made it or not."

"What do *you* think?"

"Something tells me he did. He was built like a mountain."

"Then why hasn't he sent help?"

"I told you why—because he can't. Because he'd be better off down here. Now just ain't the time to go climbing up there."

"What do you suggest? We just sit here?"

"Right now that'd suit me fine. My back's killing me so's I can hardly breathe. But I guess the best thing to do would be to get on Downtown. Don't go asking me why. First time in a long time I've had an idea in the old bean, and I ain't used to it yet."

Arthur began to like the old man. "What's your first name, Britt?" he asked him.

"Hank."

"Mine's Art."

"Pleased to know you, Art. Now you just remember what I told you. The best thing you can do is get on Downtown."

"Maybe you're right, Hank. For a minute there I thought maybe we could get out here, but just like you, I've got a funny feeling we'd be better off farther Down-

town. We left a couple of people back at Two Hundredth Street, and as soon as they catch up with us, we'll take off."

"Suits me fine, but you'll be getting an argument from Garnet."

"That's the minister, isn't it? What's the other man's name, the one you said was a cabbie?"

"Hirsch. Say, son," he whispered hoarsely, leaning forward, "you don't happen to have an extra butt, do you?"

Arthur handed him a full pack, and the old man handled it tenderly, as if he were afraid he would crush it. He tore it open, pulled out a cigarette, and offered the pack back to Arthur.

"Keep it. I've got more."

"The . . . the whole pack?" he asked, his voice breaking out of a whisper for the first time since he had begun speaking.

"Yes, I've got plenty more."

"You know how long it's been since I had a full pack all at once?"

"When you finish those, we've got more," Arthur cut in. He had almost found himself answering, "No longer than me," but the thought of admitting this to Hank somehow frightened him. It was the same feeling he'd had when he first saw Hank at the end of the tunnel. "Let's get back to the others now," he said when Hank had lit his cigarette.

Hirsch, the cabbie, had not moved from the side of the

track pit. He was a small man, and his sagging shoulders made him seem even smaller. His gray head hung forward, and the garish polo shirt he wore beneath his unbuttoned gray cardigan contrasted oddly with his sad, creased face.

As Arthur and Hank approached, Hirsch turned to them, and Garnet abruptly ended his conversation with Thomas. "Ah, there you are," the minister said, rising to his feet and dusting off the seat of his pants. "Robert and I have spent the time getting acquainted. It seems we have a mutual friend in the Reverend Martindon of Sioux Falls, Robert's home town. Now isn't it odd that we should meet this way? I'm going to write a nice long letter to Martindon and tell him all about it."

Thomas smiled self-consciously, pulled a candy bar from one of his pockets, and began to tear off its wrapper.

"Where did you get that?" Garnet hissed.

"In the . . . in the other station," Thomas stammered.

Arthur took a candy bar from his pocket and gave it to Garnet. "Here," he said. "I'm sorry, we forgot. We took it for granted that you did the same thing we did. Isn't there a newsstand in this station?"

Garnet did not answer, but quickly tore off the wrapper.

"Excuse me, but do you have more?" The voice was Hirsch's, and it surprised Arthur. He hadn't expected such deepness, such resonance.

"Sure. Here," he said, placing a Hershey bar in the cabbie's hand. "That's all we've got with us, but pretty

soon the other two who were with us will come, and they'll have more. If we'd known you didn't have any down here, we'd have brought a lot more. That newsstand back there was loaded with the stuff."

Garnet had finished his bar. "You mean there were others with you?" he asked.

"Yes. A man and a woman."

"A woman? Is she the man's wife?"

"No, she was alone."

"Alone?"

"Why not?" Arthur asked, indignant because obviously the same thought had occurred to the minister that had crossed his own mind when he had first heard Cassie's footsteps on the station platform. Somehow it seemed all right for him to have had the thought, but not Garnet, not a man of the church. "Why not?" he repeated, baiting him.

Garnet flushed and stiffened, but then relaxed and calmly asked, "Why did you leave them behind? I hope nothing is wrong?"

Arthur was caught off guard by this tactic and for a moment felt ashamed of himself. Lately he had been blowing up quite regularly, behaving exactly like the thousands of people he had been running away from all his life. "The man had an attack of some sort," he answered quietly. "He thinks it's his heart. We hoped to be able to get him a doctor, but now that's out. I've been thinking about it," he said, turning to Thomas, "and I'm

going back for them. It was pretty rough coming through that tunnel, and Cassie's not going to have an easy time lugging Carl along."

"Do you want me to come with you?" Thomas asked without enthusiasm.

"No, I can do all right alone. You take it easy. Might as well save your energy for the rest of the trip."

"Rest of the trip?" Garnet said. "I don't understand. Aren't we going to try to climb out here?"

"No."

"No? I'm sure we can do it."

"What did I tell you?" Hank's voice broke in. He was leaning against the side of the track pit, munching on the candy bar Thomas had given him. "Ask him who's going to do the climbing," he said dryly. "Tell him if he volunteers, I'll give him the first push up."

Arthur expected a flare up from Garnet, but the minister turned his back almost as soon as the old man spoke and began to talk earnestly with Thomas. When Hank had finished speaking, Garnet turned to Arthur again and spoke to him as if Hank were not there and had not spoken. "If you're going after those people," he began, "hadn't you better do so as soon as possible? The fellow with the bad heart might be having a bad time of it. If you'd like, I'll be glad to go with you."

Arthur turned without answering and walked toward the tunnel. He had had a withering reply ready to fire at Garnet, but decided against it. Actually, he had no reason for disliking him. He didn't even know him. Everything

he felt about him was a reflection of Hank's feelings about him, and after all, who was Hank?—an old man with a lame back who had his own private reasons for being sore.

It was good to be alone again in the coolness of the tunnel. Maybe after he got Carl and Cassie back to the station he would take off Downtown by himself. Then there would be no more squabbles and he could do as he damn well pleased. He didn't seem to be doing anybody any good anyhow. Maybe they would be better off with someone like Garnet making the suggestions. But alone he might not be able to get out. And he wanted to get out. Not so that he could go through with the suicide. That was a lot of crap! If he really wanted to die, he could have sat tight and waited for it. Who was he kidding? He wasn't going to all this trouble just to die.

The coolness of the tunnel seemed to have cleared his mind. Suddenly everything was simple and clear. He wanted to get out to live!

CHAPTER 9

THE SMOKE from the small fire rose only a few feet above their heads and then spilled back down into their faces. It really hadn't been necessary to build the fire—everyone agreed that it was certainly warm enough in the subway station—but it had been the Reverend Garnet's wish, and no one wanted to put up much of a fuss.

"It will cheer us," the minister had said, "and it will be especially comforting to our friend here." He nodded toward Carl Norman, who, because of his weakened condition, had become the center of Garnet's attention. Carl's face was again as pale as it had been when Arthur had first seen it, and he seemed completely shattered.

Although the fire became uncomfortably warm, it was cheerful, and soon even Hirsch crept out of his shell and

began telling about some of his experiences as a cabbie. He told them of the child that was born in his hack and of the lady who was carrying a live chicken that jumped out of the window, and when they laughed, he settled back, gratified, and began to tell them about the tuba.

"It was a big shiny one," he said, describing the instrument with his hands. "You know them—they make loud, heavy sounds. Well, this man gets into my hack with it and he says, 'Take me to Grand Central.' So I take him. When we get there, he leaves the tuba in the cab and tells me that he will come back for it after he has taken care of some business in the station. I wait and I wait, but he doesn't come back. Maybe he is lost, I think, so I go look for him. But can I find him in that rush hour crowd? No. So I am left with a big horn on my hands and no fare to cover the trip which was all the way from Seventy-second Street. So what is the outcome? My boy is now the best tuba player in his high school!"

They all laughed, Hirsch along with them, his mouth opened wide, but suddenly the cabbie's mouth closed and twisted into a mournful smile. It had not been good for him to remember his boy, his other children. He crept back into his shell and stared morosely into the fire.

Garnet was the first to speak. "Isn't this an ideal time to decide what is to be done?" he said. His tone was of the pulpit, and Arthur winced. It very well might have been: "Isn't this an ideal time to examine our sins?"

Arthur looked over at Hank. The old man was sitting up against the tiled wall, asleep. His dirty face and dark

matted hair stood out in sharp relief against the white tiles. As Arthur studied the face, he decided that he would try to spend more time with this old man whom the others ignored.

Garnet was still talking. By now he had reached the subject of the missing Frenchman, and with Hank asleep, he went on without fear of contradiction. "Yes," he was saying in the same pulpit tone, "he will send help. He was a fine, well-built fellow—isn't that right, Mr. Hirsch?—and with a great feeling of responsibility."

"But what if he didn't make it?" Thomas asked. "What then?"

"Robert, I'm surprised at you," Garnet said icily. "So young and so soon to give up hope? You would have had the Lord create the world in three days, no doubt?"

Thomas reddened. He cast his eyes about, searching for moral support, but there was none to be had. Carl's eyes were closed—it was hard to tell whether or not he was asleep; the old man was sleeping for sure, making those scary moaning sounds; Cassie and Hirsch just kept staring into the fire; and Art seemed to be laughing at him with his eyes. A fine bunch of dead beats. He turned back to Garnet. "I'm sorry," he said, frowning. "I haven't given up hope. It's just that I was wondering what there would be left to do in case something happened to the Frenchman. We should make some plans, don't you think, just in case?"

"Well what do you suggest, Robert?" Garnet asked warmly, flashing a radiant smile.

Thomas shrank back, bewildered by the responsibility cast upon him, but soon rose to what he imagined was his fullest height and said, "As I see it, Doctor Garnet, there are two alternatives. Either we try getting somebody else up the way the Frenchman went or we try to get out through the tunnel."

"I see," Garnet said. "And tell me, my son, which alternative do you prefer?"

Thomas didn't know. He would have to think about it.

"And what about you?" Garnet said, turning to Arthur. "Have you given any further thought to a plan?"

Arthur slowly turned his eyes from the fire toward the minister. He wanted to say something that would wipe that smile off his face, but instead only shook his head and turned back to the fire.

Garnet shrugged and picked up a handful of wood. "It's certainly a hungry fire, isn't it?" he said.

"No hungrier than me," Hirsch said. "Wouldn't it be nice if we had some potatoes to throw into the fire instead of only wood? Believe me, there is nothing better than roast potatoes from a fire. When I was a boy in the old country, we used to roast them all the time. Ah, such potatoes they were. For a king to eat, they were so good. Here in America the kids are too busy to roast potatoes."

Hank opened his eyes and smiled at Hirsch. "No, they ain't too busy," he said, snickering. "They don't do it because it ain't sanitary. Real civilized people don't eat like that no more, do they, Art?"

"I wouldn't know, Hank."

Carl lifted his head and ran his tongue over his lips. "Me, I could go for some wienies right now," he said dreamily. "The kind you get in those Jewish delicatessens. You know, the real fat juicy ones. It makes my mouth water just to think of them."

"Perhaps—" Garnet began, "perhaps we shouldn't talk about food this way. It certainly doesn't help one forget one's hunger, does it?"

"It's all right, Reverend, it's all right," Hirsch said. "If we haven't got it, the next best thing is to talk about it. Just now when I talked of the potatoes, I could almost taste them. And it is the same with Carl's hot dogs. It is true that they do not do my stomach any good, but in my mind I am a lot happier."

Garnet threw another handful of wood on the now blazing fire.

"Take it easy, will you, Reverend," Hank said. "That fire's plenty hot now, and we ain't in no icebox. Getting hot gives me the thirst, and I'd rather be hungry than have the thirst."

The hunger ache had been in Arthur's stomach for a long time now, and he had been fighting to keep it isolated there. But the talk of food had brought it up to his mind and now it was more difficult to bear. They had quickly disposed of the few candy bars Carl and Cassie had been carrying. He had met them at about the halfway point in the tunnel, and he had been so busy helping Carl the rest of the way, it had never occurred to him to first go back to the 200th Street station to get more candy. He

could kick himself for being so stupid. He had been halfway there; now, in order to get the candy, they would have to take a long hike for it. He wondered why none of them made the suggestion. Was it possible the thought hadn't occurred to them? Well, to hell with them, he thought. They were as hungry as he. But somehow he knew it was useless to wait. "Look," he began exploratively, "how about all that candy back at Two Hundredth Street?" He waited for their reaction, but was met with dull stares. "What I'm suggesting," he went on wearily, "is that a couple of us hike back there and get a couple boxes of those candy bars. Any volunteers?"

"But what if help comes?" Cassie said.

"I'm afraid it won't be that soon. And I find it much easier to wait when I've got something on my stomach."

"I will come with you," said Hirsch, rising and beginning to empty his pockets. "So that I will have more room to carry the candy," he explained.

They were gone over two hours. When they returned they half expected the others to be asleep, but they found them wide awake, busily discussing a plan for rationing the candy. And they paused only long enough to help themselves to the bars Arthur and Hirsch set down in front of them before continuing their discussion. Taking into account the limited amount of candy Arthur and Hirsch had been able to carry with them, they decided that each of them would receive three bars a day. Cassie was appointed storekeeper and, to avoid squabbles, the sole judge of what constituted an individual ration, for

the bars were all of different size. For example, a person would not be given three Hershey bars or three Milky Ways. He would be given an assortment which would include some of the smaller bars, or perhaps some caramels or gumdrops.

But no sooner did they settle on that plan than one of them argued that three bars would not be enough; twice as many was a more sensible ration. Surely they wouldn't have to wait much longer for help to come. After a few more minutes of haggling, a compromise was proposed: the ration would be increased to five bars a day, and as a concession to the dissenters, they would grant themselves a full ration for that day, although it was nearly over. Everyone seemed to agree to this and they all started on their second bars.

Arthur chewed his candy slowly and watched the others. They could do as they pleased, he thought, but when the supply ran out and they began to get hungry again, they would have to go hike for more themselves.

There was no talk for the remainder of the evening. Everyone concentrated on the business of eating. As each one finished a bar, he threw the wrapping into the fire, and they all watched as it was immediately licked up in one short burst of flame. By the time they finished their fourth bars, they had had enough, but nonetheless each started on his fifth. They could afford to be indulgent—hadn't they just been through famine? Tomorrow would be time enough to space their eating throughout

the whole day. And who could tell, perhaps by tomorrow they wouldn't have to worry about rationing any more.

* * *

In the morning, as Arthur rubbed the sleep from his eyes, he became aware of someone staring at him. He looked up, saw that it was Hank, and smiled at him. The old man's gaze did not waver. Arthur had the feeling that Hank had been staring at him for a long time. He felt caught by the eyes, but then pulled away from them and forced himself to speak; somehow he was certain that if he didn't speak first, the old man would continue his staring indefinitely.

"How did you sleep, Hank?"

"Didn't much."

The voice was so hoarse that Arthur felt an uncontrollable urge to clear his own throat, as if that would help the old man.

"Woke up just as you was falling off, son," Hank continued. "Tried to fall off again, but my back was killing me. Nearly did once, but them three kept me up with their damn whispering."

He had tossed his head toward the empty space beside Arthur. Garnet and Thomas and Hirsch were gone. Carl and Cassie were still asleep against the wall.

"Where'd they go?" Arthur asked.

"To try it again. Up the shaft. They was whispering about it practically all night."

Arthur rose to his feet. "Who's going up? The kid?"

"Who else? Garnet wouldn't, and Hirsch is too old. Besides, Garnet was hammering away at the kid all night. He must have talked him into it."

Arthur turned and walked toward the stairway to the second level. He didn't know yet why he was going. If the damn fool of a kid wanted to risk his neck, what business was it of his? And besides, he had no way of knowing for sure that Garnet wasn't right. Maybe this was the best way out.

When he reached the second level, he heard their voices. And then he saw them over by the elevator shaft. As he came up to them, they stopped talking suddenly and Thomas and Hirsch nervously turned their eyes to Garnet, appointing him their spokesman. "Well, and how are you this morning?" he asked cheerfully. His hands were locked together as if he were preparing to lead them in some brief prayer.

Arthur didn't answer, but turned to Thomas, who was nervously clicking one of the flashlights on and off. "You going up?" he asked him.

"Yes. We were thinking maybe it'd be a good idea to try it once more. I'm a pretty good climber. . . ."

His words dwindled off as Arthur turned from him to Garnet.

"Is there any reason why he should make it if the Frenchman couldn't?"

"But we have no way of knowing that he didn't make it."

"All the more reason why the boy shouldn't risk it.

Why don't we just wait awhile, as you suggested, and see if help comes from the Frenchman? What's to be gained by sending him up?"

"I'm not sending anyone up!" Garnet said. "Robert offered to go himself, didn't you, my son?"

Hirsch stepped forward hesitantly and opened his mouth as if to speak, but Garnet rushed on.

"He's young and strong, aren't you, Robert? Why if I were his age, I would have gone myself—even before allowing Mr. Geroux to go. Certainly you don't think I enjoy sitting by and watching others expend their energies for me? I've tried to make myself as useful as possible. Why, I've spent hours uncovering those poor souls," he said, throwing his arm behind him in an arc, "so that they may be removed for decent burial the instant help comes." His voice rose angrily. "And then you and Mr. Britt can think of nothing to do but criticize!" Flushed, he turned away.

Arthur smiled contemptuously and then turned to Thomas who seemed fascinated by the simple mechanism of the flashlight in his hand. "Is that why you didn't bother waking me up?" he said to him. "Because you thought I would try to talk you out of it? Well, all right, if you want to climb, then climb. For all I care, you can climb a damn flagpole. In fact, if you're so hepped up on showing off your skill as a climber, I'll be down here with the rest of them, rooting like hell for you. Sure, and I'll help you, too. With me to help, we should get you started in no time. Are you ready?"

Thomas stared at him apprehensively, as if afraid he were the butt of some joke. Hirsch responded first and said that they could certainly use some help; he had almost broken his arm getting the Frenchman started.

"Then let's get at it," Arthur said.

They turned to the elevator shaft, and as they did, Arthur noted that Garnet was gone. He turned and saw him about fifty feet away, bent over a rubble pile. He was pulling debris from the small mound, but was doing it carefully, almost daintily, like a child who had been warned not to get his Sunday clothes dirty.

"He's at it again, huh?" Arthur said, shaking his head.

"Never mind," Hirsch said quickly. "The two of us will be enough."

Thomas was light, and they easily lifted him to the narrow ledge above the door inside the shaft. But for Thomas to get up the shaft would be another matter. It was at least one hundred and fifty feet to the top, and the occasional metal protrusions and shallow niches along the wall were spaced high above each other, so that his rest stops would be few and far between. What made the undertaking possible was a wire cable which hung loosely from some unseen anchor above. By pulling on this cable, Thomas would be able to place his feet against the wall and, in a sense, walk up the shaft. But that demanded strong arms, and even more, a strong will. As he watched Thomas take the first few laborious steps up, Arthur wondered whether this poor kid had either. When fifteen minutes passed and Thomas did not come tumbling down

as he half expected he would, Arthur took a last look up the dark shaft and then suggested to Hirsch that they might as well rejoin the others downstairs; they could be of no more use to Thomas—the rest was up to him.

Carl and Cassie were now awake and Hank was asleep. This was getting to be a goddam game, Arthur thought. Like a sleeping musical chairs. But as he and Hirsch joined the circle and told the others that Thomas had started the climb, Hank opened his eyes and sat up. He pressed his hands against the small of his back and began drawing deep breaths. "Glad to hear it," he said. "That means we're going to sit here and wait for him."

"But I thought you were against the idea, Hank? I thought you wanted to go through the tunnel?"

"Sure I do. Only thing that makes sense. But my back is killing me something awful, and if I got an excuse to just sit here a while longer, then I'm glad of it."

"Do you think he'll make it, Art?" Cassie asked, and he hadn't heard her voice in such a long time that it startled him.

"Yes, what do you think?" Carl asked.

"I don't know," Arthur answered slowly, carefully. "I'd be afraid to try it myself. It's a long, hard pull. Maybe he's got it in him, though. I don't know."

"I am not too hopeful, if you should ask me," Hirsch said with the studied preciseness of someone not born to a language. "If you had seen the Frenchman, you would know what I mean. He was the kind of a man you would not want for an enemy. So if he has not made it,

this boy's chances are not good. Maybe though," he said, nodding his head pensively, "maybe there is one thing. The Frenchman was heavy—maybe it was hard for him to get up because he was so heavy, and maybe the boy's skinny little body will be a help to him and it will be easier for him to get up."

"Frenchie got up all right," Hank said. "If he didn't get up, he'd of fell, wouldn't he? And you don't see him at the bottom of no shaft, do you? No, he got up, all right. It's because of what he found up there that he can't send no help."

Hirsch seemed to have no taste for the argument. He had become preoccupied with sorting into neat little mounds the fine white ashes that had been blown before him from the dead fire.

It was odd, Arthur thought, how Hank seemed to be blessed with a curious intuition about what had happened, and the others, for some reason, refused to look beyond the tips of their noses. But no, he corrected his thought uncomfortably, there was good reason for their near-sightedness. They were ordinary people to whom a catastrophe such as this, no matter how terrible it seemed, was just another event in the course of life. There had been other catastrophes, and a lot of other ordinary people had survived them, so they had no reason to believe that they would not survive this one and that soon, very soon, they would walk upstairs and find the world just as they had left it. Why not? There had always been a future for

them. They had already sunk roots into that future, and so naturally it would still be there, waiting for them.

But with Hank and himself it was different. Nothing turned their eyes from the present, and no wishful dreams clouded their vision. They could see more clearly what had happened and they were willing to accept what they saw.

But he had no right to go on like this, he thought. A few Uptown subway stations had been destroyed and he had almost convinced himself that the end of the world had come. It was easy to understand how he could have done this. After a heavy drunk and a contemplated suicide, he had imagined that what he wished for had actually happened. That was a nice tidy thought, wasn't it? The end of the world, or at least his world. A chance to start from scratch and rebuild, but this time to be one of the builders and not merely a cast-off.

No, dammit, he wasn't all wrong. And neither was Hank. There was something inside him, an incessant droning, that told him he wasn't all wrong. Maybe the others heard the droning, too, but refused to listen—except maybe Cassie, if she really believed what she told him the night before last. And now maybe Thomas would find out for himself. If his skinny body didn't come falling down the shaft, maybe he would learn the secret, too; but then, having learned it, would he have the courage to come back down and tell the others?

Garnet came down from the second level, carrying a

neat bundle of wood fragments. "Well, are we ready for another fire?" he asked, and though he received only a few hardly audible grunts in answer, went about kindling the fire as if the grandstands had broken into wild cheering.

"Shall we have our first bar of the day while we're waiting?" Cassie asked.

None of them seemed enthusiastic, but they all nodded their heads, and so Cassie handed each a bar, setting one aside for Thomas.

Hirsch bit into his bar and chewed the mouthful slowly. "This much I will say for it," he said in his peculiar mock-serious tone, "at least in candy there are no bones; it is one hundred per cent meat. Now you take chicken. Every Friday night we have chicken in my house, and every Friday night we throw away half the chicken because it is bones. Does that make sense, my friends? To throw away something you have paid good money for? A sin! From now on in my house we will eat nothing but candy. Do you realize that all my life I have been paying no attention to this wonderful food? Wonderful? It's marvelous! Believe me, if it was necessary, we could live for a long time on nothing but candy."

"Let's hope we don't have to," Carl said wearily. "Although I never thought it could taste so good, I can't see more than a few days of it before it'd make me sick just to look at it."

"Do not be so sure," Hirsch countered. "If it is the only thing you have to eat, you will eat, you will eat."

"Well, never fear, Mr. Hirsch," Garnet began, disapproving of the turn the conversation had taken, "before much longer we'll be out of here and you will have your chicken again, and I'm sure you won't mind the bones at all."

"How much longer do you figure, Reverend?" Hank asked sarcastically.

It was apparent that Garnet would have preferred to ignore the old man, but the faces of the others had also turned to him with the question, and he was obliged to answer. He hesitated a moment longer while his face took time to change its expression from slight annoyance to cheerful, optimistic warmth, and then said triumphantly, "Tomorrow afternoon!"

Silence. Although no one disputed his pronouncement, neither did anyone seem to agree. Garnet did not give up. "Yes," he went on, "I'm quite certain now that we can expect a rescue party to arrive by tomorrow afternoon. If not Mr. Geroux, we can certainly depend on Robert to send help."

But then, almost as if the minister had provoked the wrath of the fates for daring to trespass on grounds reserved unto themselves, from the level above came piercing shrieks. It was Thomas, and Arthur felt nausea rise in his throat. But the shrieking continued, and he knew that Thomas hadn't fallen yet.

All except Carl and Hank jumped to their feet and scrambled for the stairway. Arthur led the way, flashing the light before him, and Hirsch kept up a constant stream

of encouraging sounds meant for Thomas. When they reached the elevator shaft, they saw Thomas hanging by slipping hands from the wire cable, kicking wildly as his body swung from one wall of the shaft to the other. Had he fallen the few remaining feet to the bottom of the shaft, he would not have been hurt, yet he clung in terror to the cable, as if suspended from the peak of the Washington Monument. They waited until he swung over toward them again and then Arthur and Hirsch clutched at his legs and hauled him in through the shaft door. They laid him down on the platform, unconscious, and then Arthur looked up at Garnet. The minister's eyes were closed, and his chin had fallen to his chest. Slowly he shook his head from side to side. He was Jacob unveiling Leah; he was Joseph sold into slavery; he was Adam expelled from Eden.

CHAPTER 10

ARTHUR LED the way through the tunnel, walking slowly and carefully between the rails of the tracks. Now and then he switched on the flashlight and threw its beam into the darkness ahead of him. The way seemed relatively clear and they had had to dig through an obstruction only once since they had started Downtown.

Hank was second in line, and at regular intervals Arthur turned to give him a hand; the old man could barely keep up the pace, slow as it was. Thomas came next and Arthur could hear him still spitting into his hands. He felt sorry for the boy. After a torturously slow climb, Thomas had almost reached the top of the shaft. He had stopped in a niche for a final rest before climbing the few remaining feet, but when he had left the niche and had begun to

pull himself up the cable, he had found that his arms had given out. And on the way down he had not had enough strength in them to come down gradually. The wire cable had torn away the skin on his hands and had burned into the flesh.

They had given him as much time as possible to recover, but they had been eager to move on. It was obvious to everyone that they had better move on Downtown, where perhaps it would be easier to get out. There would be no rescue party "tomorrow afternoon" or probably any afternoon if they just sat and waited for it. Even Garnet had given in and no longer spoke of rescue parties.

They had tried to cheer up Thomas, but the boy seemed not to hear them. Ever since they had left 190th Street, he had done nothing but spit on his hands. Arthur thought of telling him that saliva wouldn't help, but the boy seemed to take comfort from the repeated spitting, and after all, they were his hands.

The next station would be 181st Street, Hirsch pointed out during one of their rest stops. None of them had ever gotten off at that station and, except for seeing it casually from the window of a train, no one knew enough about it to tell them what to expect. But in the murkiness the station seemed exactly like the one they had just left.

Someone remarked that if they could get to the surface at this station, they would find themselves at the George Washington Bridge.

The bridge stretched dimly before Arthur's mind's

eye, and he wondered if the huge, sterile expanse was still standing. He had used it as the starting point for many a hitch-hiking trip. You were almost sure to get a ride if you waited long enough. And even later, without a uniform, there was always someone who would pick you up, provided, of course, that you looked halfway decent. If the bridge has fallen, then it will have to be put up again, he thought, smiling; otherwise, what would happen to all those hitch-hikers?

"What is so funny, my friend?" Hirsch said, coming up to him. "I would like also to smile."

"Just something I was thinking about, Hirsch. Say, why do we keep calling you Hirsch? What's your first name?"

"It's Charlie. But Hirsch is fine with me. That is what everybody calls me—except some people in my neighborhood who say 'Hoish,' like they are sneezing. Yes, Hirsch is fine with me."

"O.K., then Hirsch it is."

"My friend . . ." The cabbie had lowered his voice to a whisper, although the others had already gone ahead into the station. "Art, my friend, I want to ask you something." He hesitated a moment. "Tell me, what has happened down here? The explosions . . . this destruction. What has happened? I have tried to think about it, but my head swims. I went to see my brother—he is dying from cancer—and I stayed longer than is my habit to stay. Then, when I came down to the subway—the explosions and this terrible destruction. I have not been able to think

since it happened. My heart is filled with worry for my wife and my children, and something in my heart tells me that my brother has died. And I—his only brother—cannot go to his funeral."

Arthur heard him move away, and he followed the sound of his sobbing back into the tunnel.

"I'm only a bum, Hirsch," Arthur said coldly. "A lousy tramp, that's all. How should I be expected to know what's happened?"

The weeping stopped abruptly. Although he could not see Hirsch, Arthur could feel his eyes on him.

"If you are a bum, Art," Hirsch said, his voice calm now, "if you are a bum, it is because you think you are. I am not an educated man, Art, and though I sometimes enjoy playing the fool, in my small circle of friends and relations I am not considered to be a fool. And this I have learned: You can try to be a lot of things, but what you finally become is what you think you are. Nobody has called you a bum, my friend Art. Your clothes are dirty and you need a shave, but look at me: my clothes are dirty and I need a shave, too. Here we are all alike. I had no way of knowing what you were by how you looked. But if you tell me you are a bum, then that is what you are, because that is what you think of yourself."

"Goddammit, I don't need any lectures!" Arthur snapped. "From you or anybody else!"

"Be quiet!"

Arthur blinked his eyes in the darkness and obeyed.

"I do not want the others to hear this . . . yet, so listen to me. I asked you just now what you thought because this is driving me crazy. I don't care what you are —or think you are—I have a funny feeling about all this and I think you also have this feeling. After I tell it to you, I want you to say in one word if you think it is true —yes or no. Just one word, please, because then I must be alone . . . to think. It is this, my friend Art: I feel that there is nothing left upstairs! That everything and everybody has been wiped out!"

Arthur's answer came forth in a whisper, though he had not intended it to.

"Yes."

He heard Hirsch turn, and then heard the weeping; it was low and almost childlike. Arthur walked out of the tunnel and picked his way through the rubble to the platform and the others.

* * *

In the morning they decided to search the station before continuing their journey Downtown; there was always the possibility that someone lay hurt somewhere, too feeble to cry out for help. But although they searched hard, crying out and poking into dark areas with the two flashlights, they found no one on either of the levels. The station had been so badly damaged that it was doubtful that anyone could have survived. Only a small part of the second level remained intact on its supporting columns; most of it had tumbled down to the train level, spilling

over the platforms and into the track pits in a tidal wave of concrete and stone.

There seemed to be more light in this station than in the others. That would mean there were larger holes at the top, one of them pointed out. Perhaps if they followed the many pencils of light until they found these holes, they could get out through them. But the suggestion was overruled. The fiasco at 190th Street had convinced most of them that their only salvation was the Downtown route. No one worried about how far down. Somewhere Downtown they would find a station that had not even been touched, and they would simply climb the stairs and find themselves safe and sound on the street.

There was a chill in the air when they arrived at 175th Street that night, and for the first time Garnet's fire was welcomed by all. But in spite of its warmth, Hank's thin, wasted body, which lay stretched out in front of it, shook and trembled.

The old man had collapsed in the tunnel, and now the others around the fire watched and waited grimly for death to come and release him from the pain which tore at his body. For a long time Hank made no sound, biting his lips to seal in the cries of pain, as if afraid that his life would fly out with the escaping cries; but now his body relaxed and he turned his head to the fire, as if aware of it for the first time. He began to move his lips, forming words that had no sound, and slowly lifted one of his hands, beckoning to the others. Arthur, who sat near the old man's head, bent over him and, taking the raised hand

in his own, said quietly, "What is it, Hank? What are you trying to say?"

Hank's hand pushed upward and came to rest on Arthur's face. "Frankie?" the old man began in a forced whisper. "They said you was dead. You ain't dead . . . are you, Frankie?"

Arthur turned self-consciously to the others for a second and then said, "No, I'm not dead. I'm right here beside you."

"I told Ma you wasn't . . . but there was a telegram and she died thinking you . . . you was dead. If I'd only known."

"Don't talk. Try to rest."

"Why'd they lie to us? It killed Ma. I told her not to believe the telegram. She wouldn't listen."

The old man's hand dropped to his side, and he tried to use it to raise himself. Arthur raised him to a sitting position.

"She wouldn't listen. You're not dead."

His head fell forward slowly and then dropped suddenly, bouncing twice against his chest before coming to rest. With one hand supporting Hank's head, Arthur gently lowered the old man's back to the ground and then turned to the others. "I suppose we should find some way of burying him."

"I will help you," Hirsch said.

"Where are you going to dig the grave?" Cassie asked.

"Maybe we can find a spot down at the other end of the platform," Arthur replied.

He rose and picked up the spade. He handed one of the shovels to Hirsch, who had followed him, and together they turned and disappeared into the darkness. Soon there was the sound of digging, and those by the fire remained silent. They turned their eyes away from the still form which lay before them and tried to think of other things and to remember other sounds. In a short while the digging stopped. Arthur and Hirsch returned to the fire and, without speaking, lifted Hank's body and again disappeared into the darkness. A moment later Arthur reappeared and looked directly at Garnet. "Hirsch thinks it might be nice if you said something over the old man before we cover him."

Garnet was lifting another piece of wood to the fire and seemed not to have heard.

"Is there something you want to say before we cover him?"

Garnet kept his eyes on the fire and said quietly, "No. No, there isn't."

Arthur turned and walked away. There was no sound in the station except his footsteps, and those around the fire, except Garnet, turned to each other.

"God, I'll bet that's the first time this has happened," Carl said as the sound of the digging began again.

"What?" Cassie asked.

"Someone being buried in a subway—I mean, on purpose."

"For God's sake, Carl!"

"I wonder where he's from," Thomas said. "Nobody

will know what happened to him . . . his family and all."

"He probably doesn't have any family," Carl said. "You heard that about Frankie and his wife."

"We shouldn't have hurried him so," Cassie said. "I didn't realize he was hurt so badly. We should have let him rest longer."

"Nobody worried about me resting," Carl protested. "How good do you think I feel?"

Arthur and Hirsch returned and, without speaking or looking at the others, laid aside the shovel and the spade and took their places at the fire. Arthur leaned forward and stared vacantly into the fire, but Hirsch turned angrily to Garnet. "What a terrible thing to do! You call yourself a minister? You are a *nothing!*"

Garnet remained silent, with his eyes intent on the fire, as if he hoped that somewhere within the flames he would find the answer to a terrible, burdensome question.

"In the other station," Hirsch went on, raising his voice, "you spent all your time digging up those people. I said to myself, 'Oh, how nice, how decent he is to the dead.' But now, when it comes to saying a few words for an old man like Hank, it turns out that you are not so decent after all. What is the trouble—he was not good enough for you?"

In a murmur, Garnet said, "No, that is not why."

"So why?" Hirsch shouted. "He is a man, no?" And then in a quieter tone he added, "And a man has got a right to have a prayer said for him, no?"

"Yes," Garnet replied, "but not every man has the right to offer that prayer."

Hirsch looked at him suspiciously. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Sighing deeply, Garnet turned his eyes from the fire and looked directly at Hirsch. "I had hoped," he began slowly, "that it would not come to this for a little while yet. I wanted more time to think. But what is the use? I have been deluding myself and all of you from the very beginning."

Slowly he turned back to the fire, and while his eyes resumed their fruitless search in the flames, continued to speak, and the others realized that he was speaking, not to them, but to himself, finding his reflection in the mirror of fire.

"I cannot pray for Mr. Britt," he went on. "I cannot pray for anyone. I no longer have the right to act as a minister of the Lord. That right was taken from me with the first sounds of destruction. I knew in that precise moment what all this meant, and I also knew that I, as a spiritual leader, had failed. Oh, yes, I pretended to believe that this was only a chance disaster, that we would climb out of here and find that all was well. Many times I found that I had almost convinced myself of that. And I tried my best to convince you, too. Perhaps that is why I could not help." He paused and bowed his head. "Perhaps that is why I was so rude to Mr. Britt, because somehow he, too, knew what had happened, but refused to deceive himself as I was doing. Yes, all that time,

though I pretended otherwise, deep in my heart I knew that when we did reach the surface, we would find nothing but destruction."

Only the sound of the crackling fire filled the next long minutes, and then finally Thomas cried out, "But you're still a minister! You've got to pray! If it's true what you say, now is when you've got to pray!"

Garnet turned to the boy and in a soft, patient tone said, "Robert, I'm afraid you don't understand. You won't think it is hindsight when I say I saw this coming. I suppose there were many. Thousands, perhaps millions of us. We prayed, Robert, we prayed incessantly and fervently. We prayed for only one thing. And yet this has happened. What can one think other than that our prayers were false, lacking sincerity? A whole world has been destroyed and yet you ask me to pray for you again, though I have devoted my life to it and have failed? Because we happened to be left alive does not mean that my prayers have been answered; I did not pray for just the few of us, but for the whole world. Perhaps we have been left only to be destroyed a little later. We shall see. Meanwhile I have been given evidence of my unworthiness and so I cannot pray for Mr. Britt and I cannot pray for us."

The fire had begun to die out and now threw off only a slight warmth, but no one made an attempt to build it up again.

CHAPTER II

THEY PASSED THROUGH the 168th Street Station without stopping and paused at 163rd Street only long enough to sleep a few hours and to re-stock their diminished supply of candy. As well as being pulled by the lure of "Downtown," they were now being pushed by a new force. Garnet's confession had set it in motion. It was the same terrible force that drives survivors from a plague-stricken city. Although they did not know whether they would reach safety, they knew they must flee nonetheless, for it was the only course open to them. And in their flight they needed a leader. At first Garnet, a man of God, seemed the logical choice. But he had hidden from his God and used fear instead of faith to push himself on. And so they had turned to Arthur.

Although not a word had passed between them, the job was offered him and he had accepted it.

It wasn't until they reached 155th Street that they found other survivors. There were three of them: two women and a man. The man, Chuck, was short and slight, and the short brown hair that fell over his wide forehead gave him the air of a Roman patrician. He had come down to the subway with one of the women, Phyllis, and now held her close to him. Her face was composed, but her eyes, almost as dark as her glistening black hair, showed that she was frightened.

The other woman was perhaps twenty-eight or twenty-nine, short and emaciated, with warm, watery eyes that seemed unable to remain still. Her name was Virginia, she said as introductions went round the group, and then suddenly collapsed to the ground. They all converged upon her, but Phyllis, who had taken a hypodermic syringe from her purse, waved them away. They turned their heads as the needle was brought to the dry red skin of the woman's arm, and Chuck explained matter-of-factly that this had been happening ever since they had been there.

"She's diabetic," he went on. "A pretty bad case. That's a diabetic coma she's in now, but the insulin Phyllis is giving her should bring her out of it pretty soon. You see, this has been especially rough on her because all we've had to eat down here is some candy, and that's like poison for her. She hasn't been able to keep a balance between the sugar she eats and the insulin she

takes. After the first time she passed out, Phyllis made her teach her how to use the syringe just in case. We've just about been going nuts. When she eats too much candy, she starts going into a coma and she needs insulin. Then it seems she always takes too much insulin and so she needs more candy or she goes into insulin shock."

"Does she have enough insulin with her?" Cassie asked.

"That's the whole trouble," Chuck said, shaking his head and jerking his thumb toward Phyllis and Virginia. "That's the last of it she's giving her right now."

"Then she won't be able to eat at all," Arthur said, looking down at Virginia's face, which was a ghastly white.

"I don't know what she'll do then. On top of all that, she's as excitable as hell, and works herself up to a point where she passes out for the slightest reason. For all I know, that's why she passed out now. But I don't blame her. When I heard your voices in the tunnel, I felt like passing out myself. Where've you been, what have you been doing? For God's sake, tell us what happened down here!"

Arthur led him aside and told him; he told him everything he knew, from the first sounds of the explosions to the misty but final conclusion they had reached. And although Chuck's little group had not yet reached that conclusion, their story was almost the same. They, too, had tried climbing first, and for a while they had considered going Uptown, but just that evening they had decided that it might be wiser to go Downtown. It was

difficult for Arthur to tell whether or not Chuck believed what the rest of them had almost fully accepted; his face gave no hint of what he was thinking. It was only later, when Arthur saw him rejoin Phyllis, take her to a dark corner, and speak in earnest, hushed tones through her quiet sobbing, that he knew Chuck believed it.

* * *

Chuck could not take his eyes from Art's face. In sleep, with the wonderfully blue eyes closed, the face had changed to a shallow, lifeless mask. It was not the same face that had looked at him in a way that had made him believe, unquestioningly, what he said. Now it was a dirty, stubbled face with ugly bruises on the cheekbones. What, in God's name, Chuck wondered, had he seen in the face to make him believe what he had been told? Yes, and still believe? But then perhaps it wouldn't have mattered who had told him. Perhaps anyone could have made him believe. Perhaps all he had needed was someone to put it into words. He had been afraid to ask Phyllis—it was too much like asking himself—and Virginia had been beyond asking. And so it had remained for someone else—anyone—to confirm a suspicion that had been with him almost from the beginning.

But what now? What was the difference if you believed or didn't believe if you didn't know what now? How were you supposed to react to something like this? Cry? Beat your breast? Tear out your hair? Or maybe you were supposed to say good riddance? Maybe you

were better off if you didn't think about it at all and just thought about yourself. There was Phyllis to think about. She wouldn't approve of these thoughts. She wouldn't think it was right to think only of yourself. But why not? Who else cared about you besides yourself? Who had cared about them, about what they had felt, about what they had wanted? Now they didn't need anyone to care about them. That was all over. Now they could do as they damn well pleased.

But it was funny, he thought . . . if things hadn't been the way they were, maybe they wouldn't be here now. Maybe they never would have come down to the subway and they would have been killed, too.

They had been walking for hours that night, taking busses going in any direction, walking more, stopping only to light cigarettes, and then walking on again through deserted streets until finally, when they had become too tired to walk any more, they had found themselves in front of a subway entrance somewhere in upper Manhattan. They hadn't spoken much that night. All the possible words had already been used over and over again. All that had been left to them was to say good-by at the end of the subway ride and to start on new lives somewhere.

It didn't have to end that way. They could have told Phyllis's parents to go to hell. It wouldn't have been the first time a Christian married a Jew. Thousands of couples had made it work. Why couldn't they? But you had to

have a certain kind of temperament to fight something like that, and neither he nor Phyllis had it. You had to be able to block your ears to your mother's wails of anguish, to her threats of suicide, and Phyllis hadn't been able to do that. It had been easier for him—he had no parents. But his pride had been hurt, and he had not worked as hard as he should have to bolster Phyllis when she had begun to falter. He had felt that she must reach the decision on her own, be strong in her own desire, or their marriage would fail. But alone Phyllis had not been strong enough, and they had finally decided to give up.

That walk on Sunday night was to have been the last time they would see each other, but it had led them into a new world where there was no one who could pull them apart again. A new world, Chuck thought, but what kind of a world?

* * *

Although Phyllis tried to concentrate on stopping the weeping inside her, she could not restrain the thought which had been pushing to the front of her mind ever since Chuck had spoken to her. She turned to him now, and their eyes met. How wonderful his eyes were! Was the same thought behind them? If she spoke, would he say that it was wrong to have such a thought when so much had been lost? She looked into his eyes for a long time and then knew that he had had the same thought,

and it no longer seemed wicked. The old world was gone, and they would not have to leave each other. But, she realized sadly, if she had been given the choice, she would have chosen the world.

CHAPTER 12

IT WAS in the tunnel between 155th and 145th streets that they came upon the train. It rested on the Uptown track, and Arthur, leading the way through the darkness, ran into it and fell to the ground. He knew at once what it was he had hit, and as he was helped to his feet by the others, he began to laugh. This was *his* train, the train he had waited for, and now he had fallen in front of it just as he had planned. It was the kind of funny story you wanted to tell people about, too good to keep to yourself, but as he listened to the whispers behind him, he realized that they would never understand, and he stopped laughing.

"Look," he said, switching on the flashlight and throwing the light ahead of him. "We've got company."

For a long time no one spoke; they seemed to be holding their breath. Finally Chuck said, "I wonder what happened to the passengers?"

Arthur cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, "Hello! Anybody here?"

He was ready for the echo this time and waited until it died before listening for a response. There was none. The train seemed to look down at them contemptuously with its red and green eyes.

"It isn't possible that they were all killed, is it?" Hirsch asked, coming up from the rear.

"No," Arthur said, "I shouldn't think so. At least, I don't see how. Practically nothing's happened to the train. It just stopped dead, that's all. The passengers should have been O.K."

"Then they must have gone on through the tunnel. Maybe they are at the next station."

"Could be."

"Then let's hurry and get down there!" Carl said, coming up to Arthur and breathing heavily. "Christ, let's get down there!"

"Relax. We've gone far enough for today. I should think you'd be knocked out. At any rate, we've been going too fast for the women, and frankly, I'm a little bushed myself. Doesn't the prospect of a nice soft bed tempt you?"

"What do you mean?" Carl asked Arthur suspiciously.

"In there," Arthur said, pointing to the train. "Plenty of soft beds for everyone."

"Hell, yes!" Chuck said. "The seats!"

"Sure," Arthur said. "Come on, Chuck, help me find an open door."

Arthur played the light ahead of them and they walked alongside the train, checking its doors. In the third car from the last, the sliding doors in the middle of the car were half open. "Down here," Arthur shouted back to the others, flooding a path of light for them.

Arthur boosted Chuck up into the car, and the two of them helped the others in. When they were all in, Arthur went to one of the seats and began pulling at it. "If they're removable," he said, "we're in luck." The seat pulled free, and Arthur smiled. "Swell, we can make ourselves real fine beds out of these. Two per person should do it. Here, Chuck," he said, directing the light at the floor, "let's lay four of them out. Virginia and Cassie can sleep here."

Virginia and Cassie remained behind, and the others followed Arthur to the far end of the car. Four more seats were laid out for Garnet and Carl.

"The rest of us in the next car," Arthur said, as he led the way through the coupling platform of the adjoining car. Here Chuck and Phyllis made their beds at the near end, and Arthur, Thomas, and Hirsch prepared to bed down at the far end.

"Look, Art," Hirsch whispered. "Those kids . . . maybe they would like to be . . . you know."

"Hirsch, you're full of surprises," Arthur whispered back. And then, turning toward Chuck and Phyllis, he

called out, "It's a little too crowded down here for the three of us. We'll take the last car."

"Sure, Art . . . and thanks."

"The man said 'thanks,' Hirsch," Arthur said, nudging the cabbie in the ribs.

"Ah, you know how it is, Art. They are only kids. Why, when we were their age——"

"Hey, just a minute there! I'm not ready for the old rocking chair yet."

"So? And who says you are?" Hirsch said, entering into the spirit. "And who says *I* am? Maybe you think I'm all finished, heh? Listen, if Chuck was to get lost, do you think for a minute that little Phyllis—little? she's not so little—do you think she would be lonely with me around?"

"They're not married, are they?" Thomas said. His voice startled them both, for they had forgotten he was with them.

"And how do you know?" Hirsch said. "You asked them for their marriage license?"

"Why should that bother you?" Arthur said.

"Oh, it doesn't bother me. Just seems a shame Chuck's the only one having any fun. She's not bad, and like Hirsch says, she wouldn't be lonely with me around."

"Thomas," Hirsch began, "when I said it, I meant it for a joke. Somehow, the way you say it, it sounds dirty. It makes me want to wash your mouth out with soap."

"Jesus Christ, why don't you guys stop picking on me?

Every time I open my mouth, someone's got something to say about it!"

They heard him pick himself up from the seats and stamp down the aisle of the car. There were two loud crashes as seats were thrown to the floor and then silence.

"You know, Art," Hirsch began softly, "I am sorry I cannot like him. I want to because I've got a boy just about his age. But there is something about him that will not let me like him. What it is, I don't know exactly. All the time he is all tightened up like he is mad about something. And you—do you like him?"

"No."

"I thought so. Do you like me?"

"Go to sleep, Hirsch. We want to get an early start."

"Tell me—do you?"

"Yes, sure I do. Now go to sleep."

"I am a Jew, you know."

"Now what in hell difference does that make?"

"I don't know. I just thought I would tell you. Many times I have made friends with people and then they would find out I am a Jew and phoo! that would be the end of that. You see, a lot of people think Hirsch is a German name."

"All right. You're a Jew and I'm a Buddhist. Now go to sleep."

"You know, it is very funny, Art," Hirsch went on pensively. "If this is really the end of the world—or even if it is only the end of the city—I have no right to be

here. In New York alone you could find at least a million Jews who are more religious than me. Oh, I go to the synagogue on Yom Kippur and things like that, but then I am not so careful about not eating ham and things like that. It seems to me that if God was looking for people to save, He could have found a better Jew than me."

Arthur sat up and lit a cigarette. In the fleeting light of the match he looked down at the twisted smile on Hirsch's face.

"And so I have been asking myself," Hirsch continued, almost in a whisper, "are we the ones who have been saved? We, who are down here?"

Arthur knew that Hirsch did not want his question answered. He ground out his cigarette and lay down.

* * *

The track pit was flooded the rest of the way into 145th Street. The greenish oil-flecked water rose flush with the surface of the rails, and the pilgrims now carried their shoes as they sloshed between the rails of the tracks. Now and then one of them stubbed his toe or landed painfully on the edge of a crosstie with a tensed arch. They had to move slowly, for Virginia had fainted midway, and Chuck and Thomas were carrying her. Although she was not heavy, her weight hanging between them kept throwing them off balance, and first one and then the other would trip and fall, bringing all three of them down in a wet tangle of arms and legs.

Carl whined that he would surely die if he had to keep

walking through this miserable slop, but Arthur paid no attention to his complaints and continued to lead them on, for there wasn't a dry spot in sight. They would have to keep moving until they reached the next station and its dry platform.

It took them almost three hours to get to 145th Street, but when they got there, they could stay for only a short time, for a heavy stench of escaping gas burned into the back of their throats and brought tears to their eyes. Their supply of candy was low, and so before they moved on, they went over to the newsstand. But it was stripped bare. Gradually the meaning of its emptiness became clear to them: others had been there, other survivors. And so, forgetting the gas fumes, their disappointment at finding no candy, and even their exhaustion, they set out eagerly, after only a brief rest, to catch up to these strangers who had gone before them.

They followed the tracks up an incline and soon left the water behind them. They left behind them, also, the stench of the gas, though they smelled it on their clothes for hours afterward. Virginia had regained consciousness during the stop at 145th Street and now insisted that she could walk. Chuck and Thomas walked beside her, though, ready to reach out for her if she fell again.

The 135th Street station was as dark as the tunnel, and they knew it was night again. In the light of the flashlight they found a section of the platform which had not been covered by rubble, and they immediately formed a circle. Presently Arthur and Thomas left it to find some

wood for a fire, for there was a chill in the air, and their feet were still wet from the flooded track pit. But they could find only a handful of wood scraps. Then Arthur's flashlight fell on the charred remains of a fire, and he realized that the groups of refugees which preceded them had used up most of the wood. "It's not going to be easy from here on in," he warned the others. "When we get to the next station, we'll probably find the same thing: little wood and no candy. We can't tell how many groups there are ahead of us. There are the people from the train, there may have been some people at One Hundred Forty-fifth Street, some more at this station, and more farther Downtown. I guess our mistake was being caught so far Uptown."

"That's good for about five more minutes and that's all," Carl said, pointing to the fire, which was dying out.

"How about the track ties?" Chuck suggested. "Do you think we could pry one or two loose, Art?"

"I don't think so. They're wet from the water that was in the pit. Even so, it would take some doing to get one of them loose, and I hate to take a chance on ruining our tools. We'll need them later."

"I guess you're right," Chuck said. "We'd better relax and try to talk ourselves into being warm, huh?"

"It's warm and I love algebra," Phyllis said brightly.

"What does that mean?" Chuck asked her.

"It's something my high-school math teacher taught me. Whenever it was too hot outside for the class to concentrate on work, he would tell us that it was all in the

mind, that we should say over and over to ourselves: 'It's cool and I love algebra.' I've just changed it from *cool* to *warm.*"

"Did it work?" Chuck asked, reaching for her hand and bringing it to his lips.

"Sometimes."

"I wish I could make my mind work like that on my stomach," Chuck said. "No matter what I keep telling it, it insists it's still hungry."

Cassie smiled, opened her purse, which had been serving as their storehouse, and began passing out candy bars, one to each.

Arthur tore the wrapper off his and bit into it, chewing the sugared coconut slowly. If only it didn't make him so thirsty. "How many more in the kitty?" he asked Cassie.

"Twenty-four."

"My God, are we that low? Hold it a minute, everybody!" he said, rising to a squat.

They all stopped chewing and looked up at him.

"You heard what she said. Only twenty-four left. There's nine of us, so that makes about two and a half bars apiece. We'll have to cut down. And we'd better start tonight. Save half of your bar for tomorrow."

"What's there to get so excited about?" Thomas said.

"We'll probably find some more down the way."

"I don't know how you can say that, Thomas. You saw what was left in the newsstand in the last station and you were with me just now when we looked at the one

here. Of course, if you like eating cigarettes or pipe tobacco, they left us some of that. And oh yes, there are a couple of packages of Sen-Sen. They make good eating, too. Look, why don't we stop kidding ourselves? The people before us didn't know we were coming and they didn't leave anything on the table. They even used all the magazines in the newsstand for their fires. These stations have been picked clean, and the farther Downtown we go, the cleaner they're going to be, so we'd better wise up and conserve what we've got. Two and a half bars can be an awful lot if you go easy on them."

"Christ," moaned Carl, "two and a half bars."

"You can each have three," said Virginia in a monotone. "I don't want any candy, and eight into twenty-four goes three times." She closed her eyes. "I can't stand to look at it."

"But you've got to eat something," said Phyllis, who sat beside her. "Chuck, she's got to eat something."

"Maybe she knows what's best for her."

"*Is* that what's best for you?" Phyllis asked Virginia.

"Oh God, how do I know? I want to die, I want to die!"

She fell toward Phyllis and buried her head in her lap, muffling the sobs which shook her body. Phyllis's hand went to Virginia's head and stroked her dry, lifeless hair.

Arthur waited until everyone's eyes returned to the fire and said, "It will stand the way it was: two and a half bars each. Cassie, no bars tomorrow morning. Tonight's will be split between tonight and then."

"Say, Mr. Leader," Thomas began, and Arthur jerked his head toward him, "what if I eat all of my bar tonight? What if I'm so hungry I eat it all up?"

"That's plain, Thomas. You won't have anything to eat in the morning."

"What if I asked for my two and a half bars now?"

"You'd get them, but after you'd eaten them, you wouldn't get any more."

"O.K., that's all I wanted to know. Give me my share now. I'll eat at my own speed. Nobody's going to tell me when to eat and how much."

"All right, Thomas. Have it your way. But remember, there won't be any more."

"I'll worry about that. And besides, who appointed you leader anyhow?"

"No one that I can remember, Thomas. I just happened to fill a vacuum. Maybe you'd like the job?"

"I didn't say that. It's just that a few of us have been wondering how come all of a sudden you're such a big shot."

"Don't listen to him, Art," Hirsch interrupted. "He is just blowing off some steam."

"No I'm not! And you keep out of this. He's probably glad I didn't make it up the shaft because now he's got a lot of people doing everything he says. He never had it so good. Why, how many of you would even have talked to him before this happened?"

"That's enough, Thomas!" Arthur cut in. "Give him his candy, Cassie!"

"You shouldn't talk that way, boy," Hirsch said. "Art has been doing a good job."

"Save your praise, Hirsch," Arthur said irritably. "I'm doing what I'm doing for myself. I didn't think I was kidding anybody. I want to get out of here and I'm going about it the best way I know how. Just as soon as anybody has any better ideas, I'll step back and follow. What about it, Thomas?"

Thomas sat hunched over, staring at the two and a half bars which had been placed in front of him. "The hell with you all!" he cried suddenly, and breaking into tears, he ran to the track pit. "The hell with you!"

When they no longer heard his footfalls in the track pit, Cassie turned to Arthur and said, "Don't you think someone should try to stop him?"

"He's not going anywhere," Arthur said. "He just has to be alone for a while, like a person's got to sleep and eat."

"But how can you be so sure?"

Arthur turned his head toward the place Thomas had left. The two-and-a-half candy bars lay there. And then they heard "Flow Gently Sweet Afton" coming mournfully from the far end of the station.

CHAPTER 13

ONE BY ONE they stumbled into the 125th Street station. They climbed up onto the desolate platform and dropped in complete exhaustion without bothering to form a circle or build a fire, intent only on resting their aching muscles. Hirsch had announced the station even before Arthur's flashlight picked out the black numerals on the white tiled wall. After six months of traveling on the line to visit his brother, he had committed the station stops to memory, and recited them like a student rattling off a mathematical progression in reverse: 190, 181, 175, 168, 163, 155, 145, 135, 125 . . .

Carl thought of the taxi ride he had taken what seemed to be a thousand nights ago and recalled how far it was from Downtown to 125th Street. At the rate they were going, he would never make it. If his heart didn't start

acting up again, then for sure he would die of hunger. He wondered what day it was. Thursday? Friday? He had that big Hempstead deal he was supposed to close on Friday. But what did it matter now if a week of Fridays had passed? According to everybody down here, there wouldn't be any more Fridays up there. And no more big deals. But he wasn't so sure about all that. He had swallowed a lot of baloney in his day, and he had learned to be careful of what to believe. Maybe the whole kaboodle of them were nuts.

And what if it *was* true? He wasn't so bad off. The old heart could be fixed up, and he was O.K. otherwise. But what about the business? Twenty years of hard work out the window. But if there was any kind of a world left at all, he'd be all right. A good salesman always got along. He'd start from scratch if he had to, and in no time at all he'd be right back up there on top with the best realtors in the business. And he'd get there the same way he got there in the first place—by handling only the best properties and the best people. No Jews or niggers.

When he first started out, he handled whatever came his way, but after a while he saw his mistake. It took a couple of years to clean up his name, but then the word finally got around that he was O.K., and the big stuff came in faster than he could handle it. Once, though, he had a real close call that nearly put him back on the stink list. It was right after the war. He had contracted to sell a whole new settlement of houses out on Long Island. "I want it pure," the builder told him, and he had said

Sure, and, didn't he know his business after all these years? In two months he sold the settlement one hundred per cent, and of course it was one hundred per cent white. But a few Jewish families sneaked in somehow. And that's what caused the trouble. One of the Jewish families had to move to Pittsburgh, so they put their house up for sale. And who did they sell to but a nigger! He was convinced to this day that they did it on purpose just to stir up trouble. And trouble there was—plenty of it. It took him two months to get the nigger out and kill the rumors about the settlement going black—all on his own time and at his own expense, just to keep his name clean.

Well, maybe what Garnet had said would turn out to be a lot of baloney, but just in case he was right, he hoped things would be different in whatever was left of the world. They should be. A lot of the riffraff had probably been killed off and . . . well, there would always be *some;* you couldn't hope for a miracle. But as long as they had to start all over, building new houses and all, they could start out right at the beginning by keeping the riffraff in their proper place, and the first time they tried to pull anything, set them right back on their ears. He'd just stay clear of them, that's all. Handle only the good properties and the good people, he thought, closing his eyes and feeling drowsiness coming over him.

* * *

When Cassie awoke, she reached instinctively for her purse. Even before looking into it, she knew something was wrong: she would never have left the clasp open that way. She inserted her hand as if poisonous snakes were inside. The blood drained from her face and she screamed. The others awoke suddenly and gazed glassily at her.

"The candy!" she moaned. "It's gone!"

It took a moment for this news to sink into their sleep-clouded brains.

"Did you drop your purse at any time on our way through the tunnel?" Arthur asked.

"No, no. I've been holding it close to me. I couldn't have dropped it. I saw the candy inside just before I fell asleep. I even counted them. There were fifteen. We had twenty-four and then we each took one yesterday. That left exactly fifteen."

For a moment they were silent, avoiding each other's eyes.

"Someone must have been mighty hungry," Arthur said quietly.

"And rotten!" Cassie added.

"A terrible sin, a terrible sin," murmured the Reverend Garnet, shaking his head from side to side.

"Well, what do we do about it, folks?" Arthur asked.

"Why don't we search each other?" Cassie suggested. "Whoever it was, he couldn't have eaten all those bars at once. They must be on his person somewhere."

"Why do you keep saying 'he'?" Carl protested. "It could have been one of you ladies, you know."

"That's just a way of speaking, Carl," Cassie replied. "I wasn't accusing anyone in particular."

"Well, all right, just don't keep saying 'he.' "

"Shall we begin the search?" Cassie asked.

"No," Arthur said, "that won't be any good, because if I find out who the person is, I'm afraid I might want to kill him. I've got a better way. We'll do it like real ladies and gentlemen. We'll go into the tunnel one at a time. It's dark in there, so no one will be seen. The person who's got the candy will have a chance to give back what hasn't been eaten. Then no questions asked. Agreed?"

"But what if it isn't returned?" Cassie asked.

"Then there'll still be no questions asked and we'll go on our merry way, hoping to God that the thief, in his secret eatings, chokes on the stuff."

Arthur jumped down into the track pit and entered the tunnel. In a few minutes he returned and pointed to Thomas. "That's my turn. You're next."

When Thomas returned, Chuck left, and so on until they had all had their turn. When Cassie, who was last, returned, Arthur took a flashlight, and all but Virginia and Garnet followed him back to the tunnel. They flooded the area with light and searched behind every pile of rubble, but found nothing. Silently they returned to the platform.

"I guess that puts an end to that," Arthur said. "Somehow I had the feeling that it would be there."

"Oh, I knew it wouldn't be," Phyllis said, shaking her head.

Their eyes snapped toward her, but she continued to shake her head pensively, unaware of the tenseness she had generated.

"What do you mean by that?" Arthur asked.

"Oh, I just knew, that's all," she replied, still shaking her head. "A thief is a thief, and thieves don't live under the same rules most of us do. It would have been the decent thing to do if the thief had stopped a minute to think of what he'd done and of how the rest of us would go hungry if he didn't return the candy, but decency isn't one of their rules. That's one thing I've learned . . . ever since my grandfather."

Chuck glanced at the others apologetically and then turned to her. "Honey, what are you talking about?" he asked.

"You never met my grandfather, Chuck, so you wouldn't know. He was a wonderful old man. He looked sort of stern when you first saw him, but really he was very sweet and intelligent and, most of all, he was sensitive. He had a habit of clipping small poems from the Jewish newspapers and he would carry them around in his wallet. You know the kind I mean, Mr. Hirsch, the kind they print in the *Forward*."

Hirsch nodded his head and returned a misty-eyed smile.

"Whenever he got a chance," Phyllis continued, "he

would take them out and read them to people. I never understood Yiddish, but I used to pretend that I understood the poems just to please him. And actually they were beautiful to hear even if I didn't understand them, and it used to make him so happy to have someone to read them to. Well, one night he went to the movies and someone picked his pocket. When he discovered that his wallet was missing, he didn't care about the money at all, but he wept because all of his poems were gone. We placed an advertisement in the papers, asking the thief to keep the money but to please return the poems. He never did. He probably just threw them down a sewer."

"I still think we should search each other," Cassie said.

"I doubt if you'd find it," Arthur said. "The thief has probably hidden it somewhere."

"Well how about searching the place?" Chuck suggested.

"It would take too long," Arthur replied. "We'd be much better off moving on as fast as we can in the hope of overtaking the people ahead of us. They're probably gorging themselves with the stuff as they go along."

"Art's right," Cassie said. "And by searching the place, we would only be giving the thief a chance to get back to his hiding place for the candy. This way, maybe he'll starve along with the rest of us."

"You two—" Thomas began, his voice trembling, "you two have done a pretty good job of excluding

yourselves from being the thief, haven't you? What proof do we have that the two of you didn't cook this up between you?"

"You have no proof," Arthur said. "But you're right, Thomas, it could have been me, or Cassie, or anybody. We have no way of knowing, do we? Maybe we'll be able to tell later when one of us isn't as hungry as the others. But probably we won't even know that. Anyone capable of stealing the candy is also sharp enough to pretend to be hungry."

"So what's the decision, Art?" Chuck asked. "Do we start moving?"

"Just a minute," Virginia said dully, reaching into her purse. "I've got something I want to give you."

They turned toward her as one, sparks crackling from their eyes. Virginia held up a Babe Ruth and a Hershey bar.

"I haven't been able to eat them," she said almost apologetically.

"Why you goddam slut——" Carl began.

"Don't be a fool!" Cassie broke in. "That's her ration. She's not the thief. I remember exactly what I gave her."

"I told you I didn't want them," Virginia said. "Divide them up between you. Maybe it will help."

"But dear," Phyllis said, kneeling at Virginia's side, "this means you haven't been eating at all. You've got to eat something or you'll——"

"Die? I'm going to die soon anyhow, Phyllis."

"Don't be ridiculous. Soon we'll get help and you'll feel much better."

"I've never had a premonition in my life," Virginia said darkly, "but now I know I'm going to die. Remember? No more insulin. I can feel the cold already."

"Oh stop! Don't talk that way!" Cassie cried. "Art, for God's sake, can't we get started?"

"Yes," Arthur said quietly. "And we'll hold the candy for her until she's able to eat it. It belongs to her."

Later, far into the dark tunnel, Chuck and Thomas felt the burden they carried between them grow rigid, and they gently lowered it to the ground. Presently Arthur and Hirsch came with the spade and the shovels. That night, on the platform of the 116th Street station, the eight who were left divided two candy bars among themselves.

* * *

Hirsch held the bit of candy in his hand but could not lift it to his mouth, although hunger gnawed at his stomach. "Once more, just once more to see my brother's face," he said to himself. As they lowered her into the crude grave, Virginia's face had suddenly vanished for Hirsch, and in its place had appeared the drawn gray face of his brother Harry. And the face had remained with him ever since, perched there in the darkness, just before his eyes. His brother's eyes were sad and tearful, just as they had been when he had last looked into them

that night. If only he could have seen him just once more before this had happened. He would have looked at him differently. At least he would have tried. He would have tried to forget the old anger, the old hate, and he would have tried to feel pity. He would have fought down those terrible thoughts which had come into his head, telling him that he was glad his brother, his only brother, was dying of a terrible sickness. Perhaps that was the reason why he was here. Can a man go unpunished when he has been jealous of his own brother, when he has hated him, when he has wished him dead a hundred times? No, God is too good a bookkeeper to allow something like that to slip by unnoticed. The columns had to be balanced. But what had been God's hurry? Why so soon? If he had been given more time, maybe he would have been able to remember the old love he had had for his brother and he would have been able to be sorry that he was dying. Wasn't it enough to lose Ida and the kids this way without carrying before him for the rest of his life the ghost of his dead brother? Was it his fault that he had hated him? Hadn't he tried not to hate him?

In the beginning they had shared everything: hope, failure, hunger—even the same shirt. And then something new had grown within Harry. He called it ambition. They were going too slow with the grocery store, he had complained. They should get into a line that was more active or they would never get anywhere. And so they took the money they got from selling the store and bought out a failing button manufacturer on the East Side.

That year they worked like horses: Harry outside, selling, and he in the factory. They were lucky and business was good. For the first time since they had been married, Ida was able to buy a winter coat for herself. Then one day, two years later, Harry came to him and told him that they couldn't meet their bills: there was no money left in the bank account. Harry had made some outside investments that hadn't worked out. They didn't even have enough to meet that week's pay roll.

But two months after they folded up, Harry found himself a new partner. Everything was new: the partner, the money, the factory. Everything except the customers. They were the same. It was the old business all over again, except that he was not a part of it. He waited for Harry's offer. After all, he had been a good production man—he had learned how to get quality and quantity work from the operators. He would forget how much Harry owed him; he would forget how Harry had thrown away the business. He wasn't looking for payment. He wanted the job because he was a good manager and because he needed the job. But Harry kept silent and prospered while he was forced to drive a cab; there was no energy or spirit left for anything else. That winter Ida patched the lining in her coat. Then came the chance to buy his own cab. It was a lot of money for him to raise, but certainly Harry, with his Cadillac and his Sarah with her fur coats, could manage to lend it to him. But Harry was one of those who blew smoke in your face from a big black cigar while telling you that he was

broke. "Just invested in some new machinery," he would say, or, "For my brother, anything, but honest to God, who's buying buttons today?"

From then on they stopped seeing each other. Five years passed, and one didn't know whether the other still lived, though their homes were only an hour apart by subway. In fact, he might never have known that Harry was sick if not for the Coincidence. That was the way he and Ida had always referred to it: the Coincidence. It was very odd. Of all the cabs in the city, it had to be his cab that would pick up Harry that rainy Friday night. It was in front of the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, the last place he would expect to find his brother, who had moved into a fashionable apartment house in Uptown Manhattan. At first they were too embarrassed to talk much besides asking about each other's family. Then Harry began to cry and said that he had cancer, that he was dying. Instead of dropping him off at the other side of the Manhattan Bridge to get another cab, as he had intended, he drove his brother all the way home. After that, for the past six months, he had visited Harry at least once a week, usually on Sunday. He never explained why. He let them think what they wanted to, and each week he had hurried to his brother's bedside to sit back and watch him die a little bit more. Yes, he'd had them all fooled. The only one who wasn't fooled was himself, and now maybe God.

He looked into the fire that had been built with the few scraps of wood they had found. You, my friends, he

thought, you around the fire, you are no better off than me, trapped down here in this hole, yet you are a million times better off. You don't carry half the burden I carry with me, and will carry for the rest of my life. I was jealous of my brother. I hated him. It is an unpardonable sin, and I will have to pay for it. Even now, when I know I have been wrong, I still find it hard to forgive my brother's acts toward me, and for that I will suffer even more. You have a new world to build, and maybe it will be a better world, a place where it will not be possible for brother to hate brother. But how can I help you build that world when my mind and my heart are crippled?

"Why aren't you eating your candy, Hirsch?"

It was Carl who spoke to him. Why was that smirk on his face?

"Well, Hirsch? Why don't you eat your candy? Aren't you hungry?"

"Somehow I cannot eat it now."

"What's the matter? Too full? Maybe you had too much to eat already? For instance, all those missing candy bars!"

"If you were not a sick man," Hirsch said quietly, "I would hit you for saying that."

Carl began to rise to his feet, but the others pulled him back down. "I'll take two Jews like him!" he said to those who held him. "As bad as I feel!"

Hirsch turned from Carl and moved a little closer to the fire.

CHAPTER 14

AT 110TH STREET the Reverend Garnet made it known to the others that he had re-established his bond with his God and was now able to pray again.

This announcement came after they had found the three grave mounds and the crippled Downtown train, with its doors open as if waiting for its passengers. They found the graves when they climbed to the platform. Crude crosses, made of wood scraps and wire, had been placed at the head of each mound. They tilted crazily in the loose rubble, each crosspiece pointing in a different direction, like signposts indicating the various roads at a junction.

Beyond the graves, alongside the platform, was the hulking shadow of the train. It had been caught in the

downpour of concrete and steel from the collapsed upper level of the station, and it seemed a miracle to them that there were only three graves.

Thomas broke the silence by suggesting that if they couldn't find any wood for a fire, perhaps they might use the wooden crosses which seemed to be all lopsided anyway. He did not expect Garnet's violent reaction.

"We dare not think of desecrating these graves!" the minister said sternly. "Rather I, as a clergyman, must sanctify them by offering a prayer to the Lord in behalf of these poor unknown souls."

After the brief prayer, during which the others stared at him in open-mouthed amazement, he turned to them benignly and said, "Yes, my friends, I am able to pray again. I have spent the past days in deep meditation and solitary prayer, and I have come to see that I was wrong to renounce my duties as a minister, for in doing so, I was also renouncing the Lord, which is the greatest sin of all. We have been kept alive by His merciful will, and no matter what His ultimate and mysterious purpose is in doing so, we must express our gratitude for His charity. It is sinful to go on living, denying His mercy. We must do everything within human power to prove that we are worthy of the right to this second chance. There will be a great deal of work to be done in this new world, and I, for one, will strive to serve the Lord for as long as He permits me to go on living. 'I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in Him will I trust.'"

Later, as they lay stretched out on seats taken from the train and placed on the station platform, Garnet was still talking about his return to God. They set fire to one of the seats, and it blazed in the center of their circle and gave off a luxurious warmth that made their eyelids feel heavy. But they found it impossible to sleep while Garnet continued his steady, monotonous stream of words. Finally Arthur sat up and raised his hand, as if he were in a classroom. "Look, Reverend," he broke in, "we're all happy for you. And you've already convinced us that you're doing right in praying again. So now can we go to sleep? We're all tired. We've got a lot of walking to do yet."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Garnet said. "I didn't realize. It's just that I'm so overjoyed. I'm sorry I've kept you awake."

The minister's tone was genuinely apologetic, and Arthur was ashamed of the harsh tone he had used. Later, in spite of the fire's warmth, he found that sleep did not come so quickly as he had thought it would.

The next day, during a rest stop in the tunnel, Arthur found Garnet sitting at his side. It was unusual for him to be there—ordinarily he trailed at the rear of their caravan.

"I want to apologize again for last night," Garnet said quietly, almost in a whisper. "I was a bit carried away. I was too excited to sleep myself and forgot how tired everyone must have been."

"Sure," Arthur grunted, "forget it. I should have kept my mouth shut anyhow."

"I thought you might like to know that I've offered prayers for the old man—Mr. Britt."

"You mean Hank?"

"Yes. It's never too late. I thought of him almost immediately, of how he was buried without a word of intercession. Perhaps he will rest better now."

"That's swell. Well, I think we've rested long enough. We'd better get started now."

"Just one minute more. Please. I would like to ask you something."

Arthur hesitated.

"You have no faith, have you, son?"

"We should be getting started," Arthur said.

"Have you ever prayed?"

"Pray? To whom?"

"To God."

"Yes, I used to pray to God."

"Have you no faith left?"

"Sure, I have plenty left: faith in food to satisfy my hunger, faith in money to buy me what I need, faith in rain to make me wet, faith in a lot of things. Do you want to hear them all?"

"I mean faith in God."

"I know what you mean. Sure, once I had, but now I've either grown or deteriorated, depending on how you look at it, because I don't any longer."

"What happened?"

"The wheel went around too fast for me."

"Wheel? I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. I have no right to expect you to. It's a private little theory. I developed it one night in Memphis while I was working as a barker for a carnival. It's very simple. One of the rides in this carnival was a big wheel in the shape of a basin, except that there was a hump in the center. You've seen them in funhouses, haven't you? No, I guess you haven't."

"But I have. In my youth."

"Good, then you'll know what I mean. Remember how everyone tried to sit on the hump in the center of the wheel while it twirled around?"

"Why, yes."

"Well, that twirling wheel was life, and the center of it, that's where God was."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"It's easy. God was right there in the center of that wheel. And everyone on the wheel wanted to stay in the center near God. Anyway, that's the way I felt. I wanted to stay glued to the center. I even clasped arms with the other people on the wheel to make it easier for all of us to stay on. At first the wheel spun slowly and it was easy to stay on, but then it went faster and faster and our arms began to pull apart and I began to get dizzy and started to slip. Finally, when the wheel reached its highest speed, I lost my sense of balance and the whole world went topsy-turvy. I went shooting off like so much lead. I

tried it over and over again, but I finally decided it wasn't any use; I was getting new bruises on top of the old ones before the old ones had time to heal."

"That's a very interesting way of putting it," Garnet said; "but tell me: the other people at the center of the wheel, were they all thrown off, too?"

"No. There were always a few who managed to hold on."

"Was theirs a special skill? Couldn't you have learned from their example?"

"Perhaps—except that when I took a second look at them, they didn't seem to be much better off than me. Sure, they seemed happy where they were, but they were going around and around perpetually dizzy, and I figured life was hard enough without being so dizzy that you didn't know where you were going."

"And did *you* go anywhere?"

"I'm here. You stayed in the center of the wheel, and you're here, too. Does that answer your question?"

There was no answer, and soon they started on down the tracks.

* * *

That night, when they reached 103rd Street, Arthur left the fire and went off by himself into the tunnel. When he had gone about fifty feet inside, he sat down and leaned back against a small pile of rubble. He was tired, and he felt as if he were losing control of himself. Why else would he have shot off his mouth the way he

did to Garnet? What business was it of Garnet's whether or not he believed in God? Why couldn't people let other people be, let them believe what they wanted to, without snooping into their lives? Talk like that always made him feel uncomfortable, no matter how much he believed in what he was saying. Things like that were better left unsaid. You could think what you wanted, but you didn't have to shoot off your mouth about it.

Though he had spent most of his adult life widening the break with his God and his Church, he was still afraid to talk about it. The impressions of childhood were not easy to wipe away. Traces of them lingered on to frighten him with a childish fear that he was doing something wicked. His mother and father had given him religion in large, generous doses, along with equally generous doses of love, until in his mind the two were inseparable. Later, even though he felt justified in turning away from God, it was a terrible prospect, for it also meant renouncing his parents' love. It should have been easier than it was to separate the two loves. His mother and father had been devout, and what had it brought them? One killed by the mines, the other driven out of her mind. Where had been God's divine mercy? How could he believe that the two loves were one? His parents' love had been warm and comforting, but God's was aloof and false. Yet whenever he denounced God, he could not help feeling that he was betraying his parents. And so he had stopped thinking of God at all.

He was startled by the sound of footsteps coming

toward him. He reached for the flashlight at his side and shone its beam ahead of him. It was Cassie, and he remembered the night they had spoken together in that other tunnel. She had been so close to the truth.

"Why did you leave the fire?" he asked her as she sat down beside him.

"It's gone out. Art . . ."

She was hesitant, and he sensed that she would not go on unless he spoke. "What is it?" he asked her.

"Art, why did you go off by yourself? Is there a special reason?"

"No."

"Just now when the fire died and there was no more wood, everyone got to feeling edgy. Someone noticed you weren't there and said you must have gone off to eat the stolen candy."

"Do you think that's why I came?"

"No, of course not. And I told them so."

"Now you've thrown yourself open to suspicion. What's to stop them from thinking that you haven't gone off to eat the candy? Or, as Thomas suggested, you might have come to me so that we could split up our booty."

"Thomas is a fool."

"We're all fools."

"I overheard you talking to Garnet this afternoon. Tell me, Art, is that what you really believe?"

Arthur dropped his cigarette as if it had burned his fingers.

"You're not a tramp, Art. What made you this way?"

"I'm going back," he said, rising. "See you in the morning."

* * *

Her words rang in his ears. He couldn't sleep. The others were asleep when he returned, and even Cassie, who returned a few minutes after he left her, was now sleeping.

What made him this way? How did you begin answering a question like that? Where did you start? How far back did you have to go to find the fork in the road where you had taken the wrong direction? Maybe he had to go even farther back than that; maybe he had to go back to before he was born, to the two Polish immigrants who came to live and work in the small Pennsylvania coal town. Maybe right then and there the two strikes had been called on him.

But no, he was wrong. Not two strikes. Maybe one, but not two. There had been thousands of others just like him, and they hadn't struck out. It was something in him—something that made it inevitable that he would choose the wrong road when he finally came to the fork. What was it?

He rose quickly, reached for his cigarettes, and began to light one, but then crumpled it up in disgust and threw it away. He was running away. All his life he had done nothing but run away.

When had it begun? When he was a kid? When he ran away from Big Mary? He had to run from her, but what

about all those other times that followed? There was his first job, the one in the coal mine at Shamokin. It was a start—it could have led to something better. But he awoke one morning with the feeling that he had been caught in the same trap that had killed his father, and so he ran away. It was the same with all the other jobs. Six months was usually his limit. Then came the trapped feeling again, and he had to run. They were rotten, back-breaking jobs, but after a while even they were hard to find. And so he joined the Army. For a while he stopped running. Soldiering came easy to him, and he was up for corporal at the beginning of his second hitch. But then he had to run again. It was pay day, and he and Moskie had had too much beer. And the truck was just standing there with no one watching it. Even to this day he sometimes dreamt of the way Moskie had screamed when it happened: "Art! We're going over!"

He was thrown clear, but the truck exploded before he could pull Moskie out, so he climbed back up to the road and lit out of there quick. It would have meant a court-martial and then the stockade.

It was easy to change your name. All you had to do was apply for a Social Security card and give whatever name you wanted. It was '39, and all of a sudden jobs opened up, all sorts of jobs in defense work. He was the best student welder in his class, and later they saved him for the toughest jobs. He'd never seen so much money at one time. He had a car and good clothes for the first time in his life, and women. But there was the matter of

Moskie . . . and a desertion . . . and a war going on.

Maybe what he did next made up for all the running away he'd done. Maybe thinking about that one good thing he did kept him from coming down to the subway sooner. By the time his outfit was shipped overseas, he was a squad leader. There was no running away then. He saw Fred and Lenny get their heads blown off, but he stood pat. And for a while there he felt sure he was cured; he would never have to run again. But then there was that letter in the hospital . . . and that nurse. She wasn't to blame. When a wounded man dictates a letter to his brothers in the States and asks it to be signed by a name that is different from the one on his dog tags, an investigation is in order. Three weeks later he was shipped back to the States and court-martialed. "In view of your excellent combat record," his defense attorney had told him, "I'm going to make an appeal for clemency. Maybe they'll settle for a D.D. and forget about Leavenworth."

Dishonorable Discharge. And then the running began again. He had heard about the G.I. Bill. Free schooling. He could thumb his nose at the crap jobs, make something of himself. But D.D.'s were not entitled to the G.I. Bill, so he began thinking about jobs again. "Honorable Discharge, mister?" they asked him. . . . "Sorry, no openings." He tried passing himself off as a 4-F, but you had to have a little card to prove it.

Finally he did get a job. They never bothered to ask him about his past. They were interested in his future,

they said. Three bosses. Real high-powered salesmen. They were selling the kitchenware of the future, they told him, and they would make him a rich man. He made seven sales in the first week. At eleven dollars per, that was seventy-seven dollars. But his pay check read only fifty-five dollars. "Two cancels," one of the bosses told him. "Happens all the time. Husband gets home and finds fifty bucks worth of pots and pans and he blows a fuse. Makes his wife send them back." But he decided to check. One of the "cancels" was using the pots to cook supper. He went back to the office and beat up the three bosses.

And then began the biggest run away of all. When he got out of jail, he let go with both hands. From then on life was going to sleep in a cold hallway or standing in line for a cup of soup or waking up in a jail somewhere. He used to tell himself that it was only a bad dream and that he would wake up someday and be a new and different person. Well, maybe the time was now, he thought. Maybe now the dream was over. Yet how did he know? How did he know he was that new and different person? Maybe this was just another of those thousand and one fresh starts. What would keep him from running again? Why should it be different this time? Things might even be a hell of a lot worse now. Maybe the old world would seem like a cinch compared to what he might find in this new world.

Yes, all that might be so, he thought. There were no guarantees. But he felt that he had just awakened from a

nightmare, that the bad dream he had been having belonged to the old world upstairs. Now that world was gone and so was the nightmare. This time, if things were not good at first, he would find the strength somewhere to keep from running, to stick it out and help make them good. This was his second chance; you had to be lucky to get a second chance. He had to make good.

CHAPTER 15

"I WONDER what kind of world will grow out of this?" Cassie said.

The others around the small fire, which Arthur fanned to keep alive, turned their eyes to her and waited as if they felt no answer was expected of them, that she would go on anyhow. But they waited eagerly for her to continue, for no one had spoken more than a few words at a time since they had left the 103rd Street station. It was as if conversation was a burden that would retard their progress. During their brief pause at Ninety-sixth Street, not a word was spoken. And now, settled for the night at the Eighty-sixth Street station, they were relieved when someone wanted to talk. The sound of the words was good in their ears, not because of any special

meaning the words might have, but simply because words would join them together again.

"It won't be a big world," Cassie went on. "There couldn't have been too many of us left. Perhaps a few thousand. Perhaps even a few million. But that's so little compared to how many there were. I wonder if it will be a better world. There'll be so much to do, so much to learn. The thought of it frightens me."

"It frightens me, also," Hirsch said. "I am only a cabbie. What can I do in a new world? What can I contribute? Taxicabs we will not need for a long time."

Arthur placed the last of the wood on the fire and sat back. "There will be things for all of us to do," he said. "No, Hirsch, we won't need taxicabs, just as we won't need a lot of things. But we will need every person we can find who wants to help build something new and better for ourselves."

"Of course I want a better world, Art," Hirsch said. "But always before I have thought of a better world in connection with my children and their children, and their children's children. Now they are gone. I have no one. It is hard to think of working for a new world when you have no one to work for."

"You have yourself to work for."

"I am an old man, Art. Before this I did not think I was such an old man, but now I am old and tired. There will not be too much for me in this new world of yours. But do not misunderstand me, Art. For all of you I wish this new world to be good. Maybe it will be better than

the old one and we will not make so many mistakes. Maybe we will not hate each other and kill each other."

"Maybe," Chuck said, "but I doubt it. What makes you think that all hate has been wiped out? What makes you think that plenty of it hasn't been saved down here and in other holes all over the world? I don't think we've been allowed to survive because we're a bunch of Christs."

"You are right, Chuck," Hirsch replied. "We are not saints. God knows we are not saints. But maybe even the devil has learned a lesson from what has happened. Maybe hate will be killed by fear and we will learn to behave ourselves."

"I know the kind of world I want," Cassie said dreamily. "I want it to be quiet and green and full of beautiful music. From dawn until sunset, beautiful music. And as Hirsch said, everyone will behave himself and there won't be any loud noises and fighting, and it will be quiet so that everyone can hear the music."

"There'll be plenty to do before we have time to sit around listening to music," Carl said. "We'll have to find a way to feed ourselves and get clothes and set up factories to make the things we need."

"I know, Carl, but you won't forget the music, will you?"

"Of course not. Sure there'll be music. I like music just as much as the next guy. But I want to be realistic about things. There's no use pretending it's all going to be gravy. There's a lot of work that'll have to be done

before any of us can sit around in a little paradise listening to music. Nobody gets a paradise without working for it. That's something I learned early in life. I had to work like a horse to get where I got."

"And just where *did* you get?" Chuck asked.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, young fellow," Carl answered. "All you youngsters are cynical. Sure, I didn't wind up with a paradise for myself, but it wasn't so bad either. As far as I'm concerned, there wasn't very much wrong with that old world. Sure, it had its faults; there were a lot of things I would have liked changed, but for the most part, it did all right by me. But I got what I got by hard work, mind you. No loafing around and just dreaming of the good things, but going out after them and using sweat off the old brow to get them."

"I'm willing to work," Chuck said. "I've never been so willing in all my life. Only I want to be sure, before I go breaking my back, that it's going to be worth it. I feel the way Cassie does. I want to be sure there's going to be a place for beauty, for music. I want to be able to write some of that music myself. I want Phyllis to be able to paint again. I want beauty more than anything else, and if it's going to be squeezed out, then I don't want any part of your hard work and sweat."

"But there will be a great deal of beauty," Garnet said. "When you combine honest labor with prayer, the good things must necessarily follow in their wake."

"That's right," Thomas said, nodding his head.

"I'll go along with you on that, Reverend," Carl said,

ignoring Thomas, "except that I'd place more accent on the labor and less on the praying. I always found that praying for things didn't get them for you nearly as fast as working for them did."

"One does not pray for 'things.' One prays to achieve a closer communion with one's God. One prays for guidance so that one may become a better man among men. There *must* be a prominent place for prayer in our new world. Remember, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' We must turn to Him above all other means if we are to make a better world for ourselves. Unless we do, even this second chance will be taken from us."

"That's right!" Thomas said emphatically.

"I'm not denying that, Reverend," Carl said, continuing to ignore Thomas. "Sure religion is important. I'd be the last to deny that. Listen, I was as good a churchgoer as the next fellow. What I mean to say is that you can't build anything if you're going to sit around praying most of the time. If things are as bad as everybody seems to think they are, it's going to be tough going and there's only going to be room for doers. We won't be able to put up with a lot of dreamers and scoffers and tramps . . ."

When Carl faltered, Arthur said, "That's all right, Norman. I know you didn't mean me."

Carl stiffened.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I *was* thinking of you. I don't mean that you're a tramp now. I'm talking about what you were before you came down here. Men like

you didn't help the old world any. In fact, you'll have to admit that you helped drag it down. And that's something we just won't be able to put up with in the new world. It doesn't make good business sense. There's not going to be any room for people who don't contribute anything. Everybody will have to do his share of the work."

"I intend to do my share," Arthur said quietly. "In fact, I'm looking forward to it. Maybe because I've got more at stake than you have. I've got two objectives, not just one. The first is to make a place for myself; the other—and the more important one—is to make certain that what happened to me can never again happen to anyone. That should keep me pretty busy, shouldn't it, Carl? Wouldn't you say that was a full-time job?"

Carl did not answer, and for a minute or so it seemed that the discussion had come to an end. But then gradually they began talking again. And they spoke through most of the night, no longer feeling the need of sleep, for they found comfort in their own words and felt at peace with themselves.

But Arthur was uneasy. For although they all spoke of their desire for a better world, it seemed that each of their worlds was fashioned out of himself alone.

* * *

By the time they reached the Seventy-second Street station, their hunger was unbearable. Until now they

had endured it as silently as they had borne the cold, the dampness, the heavy blackness of the tunnels, and their weariness. But now they began to grumble and complain, each of them feeling that his hunger was the worst. They looked at each other suspiciously, searching for a clue that would expose the thief. They would find him sooner or later. He would give himself away because he was not as hungry as the rest of them; he was only shamming—there was food in his belly. But what if they did find him? By now the candy was eaten. They could kill him, but what good would that do?

There was not enough wood to start a fire. Even the usual circle was not formed—each of them wanted to sit off by himself. Arthur, Hirsch, and Garnet sat up against the steel columns while Cassie, Phyllis, and Thomas each chose a different rubble pile. Chuck and Carl, too restless to sit, paced the platform in the darkness.

For long minutes they would remain silent, and then suddenly they would all begin to talk at once, some of them shouting so as to be heard above the others. But then, as if by a prearranged signal, they would again plunge abruptly into silence. During one of these silences, Thomas began to play his harmonica. The music had a plaintive, hungry sound, and the others yearned for it to stop. But Thomas went on and on until, without warning, Chuck lunged at him, tore the harmonica from his hands, and threw it into the darkness. There was silence again, broken only by the sound of Thomas's weeping as he

searched for his harmonica among the piles of rubble.

"Give him a flashlight," Cassie said. "Give the poor fool a flashlight."

"You shouldn't have done that," Garnet said to Chuck. "The boy didn't mean any harm. He was only trying to comfort us."

"Well, I wasn't comforted. He's been driving me crazy with that damn thing."

"It is his way to forget his hunger," Hirsch said.

"Well, all it does is remind me of mine. If he plays that thing again, I'll kill him."

Arthur returned with the flashlight. "He found it," he said.

"Where is he?" Cassie asked.

"He wants to stay where he is."

"If he's going to play that thing again——" Chuck began.

"He won't play," Arthur said. "It's bent all out of shape."

"Well, wouldn't you have done the same?" Chuck said. "I tell you, it was driving me crazy. I didn't mean to break it; I just wanted to stop his damn playing."

"Relax," Arthur said. "He'll be all right. Maybe he'll find another one somewhere when we get out."

"I just wanted to teach him a lesson so he'd keep the damn thing in his pocket. I didn't mean to break it."

"Sure."

"If he'd only kept the damn thing in his pocket."

"Chuck," Hirsch began, "if you feel so bad, maybe you should go to him and tell him you're sorry."

"But I'm not sorry! I'd do it again if he began to play."

"Sure, forget it," Carl said. "Maybe the kid enjoys being off there alone. For all we know, maybe he's just using this as an excuse to be alone so he can eat the candy."

"Why should you say that?" Hirsch said. "You have no right to call the boy a thief."

"Maybe I don't. Maybe because I know who the real thief is, eh, Hirsch?"

"You say that like you think it is me who took the candy. This is the second time you said that. Why?"

"Why not? You don't look so bad off. You don't look hungry at all. And I've run up against your kind too many times not to know you by now."

"Carl," Hirsch said quietly, "everything inside me tells me to hit you. I would like to feel your skin under my fists. But I am not going to hit you, Carl. I am afraid that your poison will rub off on my hands. I have enough poison in me already without taking from you, too."

Carl muttered unintelligibly and became silent.

CHAPTER 16

ARTHUR WAS the first to awake, and though he was eager to move on, he was reluctant to rouse the others. In sleep, they were temporarily safe from the terrible hunger which had begun to eat at him the moment he had opened his eyes. And their silence was a relief. To wake them now would be like turning on a noisy radio when what he really wanted was quiet.

But they would have to get up sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner. The Fifty-ninth Street station was next, and maybe there they would find a way out, or something to eat, or at least a little firewood so that they could get this damn chill out of their bones.

He went over to Chuck and shook him awake. "Come

on, Chuck," he said, "get Phyllis up and let's go." Chuck opened his eyes, shuddered, and closed them again. "And Chuck," Arthur went on, "do what you can to keep the arguments down, will you? We waste too damn much energy quarreling." Chuck nodded glumly and turned to wake Phyllis.

Arthur went over to the others and roused them one at a time. When Carl began whining about his hunger only a moment after he had opened his eyes, Arthur immediately shut him up. "Not one more word, Carl!" he said. "I know you're hungry. But that's not exclusive with you. And I'm tired of hearing about it. Look," he said, turning to the others, "we may have a long way to go. Fifty-ninth Street is next. But it may be the same old story. After that comes Fiftieth Street, then Forty-second. God knows how far we have to go before we can get out of here. So if you want to make it, you'd better quit this bellyaching right now. It only makes it a lot tougher on all of us. Now let's go."

He heard them mumbling behind him, but soon they became silent and followed him down into the track pit.

Their progress was slow. Every half hour they had to stop and rest. The women, in particular, found it hard to keep up the pace. Cassie's shoes were torn to shreds, and every step she took was torture. Chuck had to practically carry Phyllis, though he himself was close to dropping from exhaustion.

As the hours wore on, their rest stops became more frequent and lasted longer until, toward the end of the

day, they would walk no more than fifteen minutes before one of them would cry out for a rest. Arthur kept urging them on, but they paid no attention.

When they had been in the tunnel over seven hours and the Fifty-ninth Street station was nowhere in sight, they stopped to rest and refused to go on, in spite of Arthur's nagging. "But we've got to keep going," he insisted. "If we stop now, we're dead. There may be food in the next station. Maybe some wood."

They did not even look up at him.

"Push yourselves a little harder. You've got to, or you're finished. Thomas, come on, get up. You too, Chuck, come on, stand up and so will the others."

Phyllis began to weep.

"Christ, no tears," Arthur said in disgust. "Now's no time for tears. Chuck, make her stop and get up."

"Leave us alone," Carl whined. "I can't move. I'll die if I move."

"You'll die if you stay!" Arthur exploded. "Can't you understand? We've got to keep moving."

They continued to ignore him.

"All right," he said, "if you don't want to come, I'll go myself."

Hirsch and Cassie began to say something, but he didn't wait to listen. He turned quickly and continued down the tracks. But almost immediately he was sorry. That was a hell of a thing to do, he thought. When they needed him most, he was running out on them. He turned abruptly and started back. But then he heard the sound

of voices, and he stopped. Were they finally coming? He shone the flashlight toward them. They were just as he had left them, sprawled out along the track pit—and silent. But he could still hear the voices. And the others heard them, too, for they were beginning to stir and sit up. Arthur turned behind him. The voices were coming from down the tracks. He began to follow the tracks around a bend. The sounds grew louder.

"Quick!" he shouted back to the others. "Down here, quick!"

They came down the tracks slowly, and Arthur hurried them on. "Quick! We've made it! We're here!"

They came up behind him and gazed with him in awe at a distant arc of light that shone at the end of the tunnel. Arthur knew what the Israelites must have felt when they first set eyes on their Promised Land.

The distant voices were louder now and seemed to unite in a chorus, urging them on. They moved forward, slowly at first, but then gradually increased the length of their steps until they were running breathlessly toward the light and the voices.

When they reached the end of the tunnel and stepped into the station, they could hardly believe what they saw. There were over a hundred people there, sitting around blazing fires. None of those around the fires seemed to have noticed them, and they felt like outlanders who had strayed into some strange city. They yearned to be a part of it, impatient with their newness, wishing that they were already with the others at the fires.

Suddenly, from one of the larger fires, a man started toward them. As he came closer, they could see that he was smiling at them, and they momentarily forgot their strangeness and smiled back. He was a handsome young man with a lean but powerful-looking body under a white T-shirt and brown gabardine slacks. Although his hair was a light shade of brown, his uneven beard was red. His small blue eyes were cool and grave, and Arthur had the curious feeling that he had been watching them from the moment they had entered the station.

"Welcome, welcome," the young man said.

They all began to speak at once, pressing forward against him, but he stepped back a few feet and raised his right hand. "There'll be plenty of time for questions later. Right now you're probably more interested in getting warm and having something to eat."

They began to press toward him again, but he turned quickly and walked off, motioning for them to follow. He led them through the station, following a cleared path through the rubble, and stopped before a smoldering fire at one of the farthermost corners. "You can stay here," he told them. "A little wood and that fire will be fine. Now I'll go see if I can get you something to eat. It's pretty late to be drawing rations, but I think I can swing it. Make yourselves comfortable; I'll be right back."

They sat down around the fire, forming their circle by habit, and looked curiously at the people around the

other fires. Why had none of them come over to greet them? Why were they sitting so still? For some reason an odd silence had settled over the station; the crackling of the fires was the only sound in the place.

And then they became aware of the eyes. Hundreds of eyes—staring coldly at them. From every fire they stared. Where there had been people before, there seemed to be only eyes now, staring at them with an intensity that forced them to look away in self-defense. Finally they saw the red-bearded young man returning with a box under his arm.

"When did you eat last?" he asked them when he came up to their fire.

They did not answer but kept their eyes on the box.

"Well, never mind. You'll probably be glad enough to get some of these." He reached into the box and pulled out a handful of dried prunes.

"Where did you find prunes down here?" Arthur asked hoarsely.

"Never mind that now," Red Beard said. "Eat first and then I'll explain." He handed the first handful to Cassie. When he had given a handful to each of the others, he sat down at the fringe of their circle and watched them as they ate.

Arthur ate slowly, savoring each bite. But it was hard to swallow—there seemed to be no saliva left in his mouth.

"I'm sorry," Red Beard said, "that there isn't anything else to give you, but we're lucky to have these."

"But where did you find prunes down here?" Arthur asked again.

"I was coming to that. When this thing first happened, we found plenty of stuff in the newsstands: candy, peanuts, crackers, and so forth, but our supply ran out about three days ago. Then, by a stroke of luck, one of our exploratory expeditions stumbled onto a caved-in wall up on the second level which led them into what must have been the sub-basement of a restaurant. They found these prunes, some canned vegetables, and a few other things. But the prunes are all that are left now. We have a strict rationing system because nobody knows how much longer they'll have to last. All these people," he said with a sweep of his arm, "have to be fed."

Arthur followed the arm and saw the mass of staring eyes again. "Why are they looking at us like that?" he asked. "Are we such a curiosity? What are they staring at?"

"They're staring at you because you're eight new mouths to feed. A lot of mouths when there's so little food."

"Maybe we should leave," Arthur said sarcastically.

"Oh, don't let it bother you," Red Beard said. "It's been the same whenever anyone new has turned up. Those who have been here awhile naturally feel that they're being encroached upon by the newcomers. But many of us don't feel that way at all. We're happy to welcome newcomers. We feel that the more hands there

are to help, the sooner we'll be able to dig ourselves out of here."

"How long have you been digging?" Chuck asked.

"About five days now. We don't have many shovels —just a few that some of us found along the way, so the digging goes slowly. But we all do our share—that is, if we want to eat."

"How much longer will it take?" Carl asked.

The young man with the red beard began to answer, but then changed his mind. He glanced at the large round wrist watch he wore and shook his head. "It's late," he said abruptly. "You'd better go to sleep now."

"But can't you tell us how much longer it will take?"

The young man rose and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "As you can see," he said, "everybody's going to sleep. There's a lot of work to be done tomorrow, so you'd better do the same. You'll get all your answers in the morning, from the Co-ordinator."

"The *Co-ordinator?*" Arthur echoed.

The young man with the red beard had already turned and walked away, melting into the group around one of the larger fires. Arthur turned his eyes to the remaining prunes which lay in the palm of his hand and for some reason could not think of eating them.

* * *

In the morning they found that they had overslept. All around them was a noisy bustle, with people going and

coming in every direction. As Arthur studied their movements, he saw that everyone had a specific task and was carrying it out with a minimum of wasted motion. What was behind this antlike activity?

Just as Arthur turned uneasily to the others around the fire, an elderly man brought another box of prunes, and they began to eat them before he had finished passing them around. Arthur took his ration and put it in his pocket with the leftover prunes from the night before; there was not even enough saliva in his mouth to wet his tongue.

Suddenly the young man with the red beard appeared, and Arthur again felt that he had been watching them for a long time. "The Co-ordinator will see you now," he said to them. "Will you follow me, please."

He led them over the length of the platform, up a newly excavated stairway, and onto the second level, where they saw almost twice as many workers as there had been on the level below. These workers—mostly men—were concentrated at the foot of a rubble-choked stairway that led to the surface, and while some dug with shovels and spades, others carried debris away in cardboard cartons that had once contained cans of vegetables and boxes of prunes. Arthur observed the stiff machine-like movements of the workers and he shuddered. Why weren't they talking to each other? Why didn't at least one of them smile—or even frown? How could so many different people have the same dull, lifeless expression on their faces?

"Right this way," Red Beard said, pointing toward a small group of men off in a corner. "They're having a meeting, but they'll be through in a minute. We'll wait here."

Arthur looked over at the men. There were four of them, sitting cross-legged around a small fire. Except for the elderly man, who might have been in his late fifties, they were not much older than himself. The older man seemed to be doing all the talking, while the others sat and listened, smoking cigarettes and blowing the smoke out deliberately in front of them.

There were bristling beards on all their faces; only the older man's was white. Arthur raised his hand to his own face and was surprised to feel the stubble there. He had not thought of his beard since all this had happened, nor had he been aware of the growing stubble on the faces of the other men in his group. Now he saw that even Thomas had the beginnings of a beard.

When he turned again to look at the men by the fire, they seemed to have ended their meeting and were now smiling at each other. The older man's smile was the warmest of all, and it lingered as he lifted his head and looked over at them. "Ah, welcome, welcome," he called out in a gentle voice. "Won't you come and sit down, please?" The other three men moved closer to the older man to make room for them. "I trust you've been given something to eat and have had a good night's rest?" the older man went on, still smiling.

They nodded their heads.

"Good. That will be all for now, Elliot," he said to their guide. "You may join the others."

Red Beard hurried across the level and disappeared down the stairway.

"I'll admit," began the older man, "that prunes don't make up a very substantial diet, but as things are, they're certainly better than nothing. You didn't bring any candy with you, I suppose? No, I didn't think so. Those who came ahead of you had already eaten all of theirs, too. Now tell me, how far Uptown were you when it happened?"

"We were at One Hundred and Ninetieth Street," Garnet volunteered, "but these people," he said, pointing to Arthur, who sat beside him, "were as far up as Two Hundred and Seventh Street."

"That's the end of the line, isn't it?"

"Yes," Arthur said.

"Then you're probably the last to come. At least from Uptown. We had some people come up from Downtown just yesterday, but you're the first to come from Uptown in the last few days. Tell me, how was it up there? Pretty badly destroyed?"

"Yes," Arthur replied. "Closed in tight."

"Did you try getting out anywhere along the way?"

"Yes, we made a few tries—but it would have taken us a year to do any good."

"I know," the older man said, nodding his head, "it's the same story from everyone. I was Downtown myself

when it happened. We couldn't even make a dent in the rubble; there just weren't enough of us. I don't know what made me decide to come farther Uptown, but I'm certainly glad I did. We collected quite a number of people on our way up, as you can see, plus all those who filtered in from the Uptown stations; and then we no longer had any reason to sit around mourning our sad fate. We had plenty of willing hands, so we began working. And now, it should be no time at all before we've dug ourselves out of this hole."

"Well, I'm certainly glad to hear that!" Garnet said, flashing a bright smile. "Are you the gentleman they call the Co-ordinator?"

"Ah, I see Elliot has been talking to you. Yes, I am the one they call the Co-ordinator. Of course it's just a title someone thought up, and I don't insist upon it being used. My name is Thornton, if you like. The others like to use the title because it symbolizes what we've been trying to do here—co-ordinate our efforts in order to accomplish our goal. These gentlemen," he said, pointing to the men on either side of him, "are Mr. Hartley, Mr. Simpson, and Mr. Rawlins, or, as the others say, my Assistant Co-ordinators."

The three men affected the Co-ordinator's smile, but their eyes remained aloof.

Arthur looked steadily at the four men for a few seconds, and then no longer tried to restrain the question which had perched itself on the tip of his tongue. "If

you don't mind my asking," he began, "how did you gentlemen come to be the leaders? Some sort of an election?"

The Co-ordinator's face darkened, and one of the Assistants, the one introduced as Mr. Simpson, began to rise to his feet. The Co-ordinator reached over and touched his arm, shook his head, and Mr. Simpson sat down. "It's all right, Mr. Simpson," he said quietly; and then, turning to Arthur, "there was no election, young man, for the simple reason that it would have been impossible to hold one. Picture, if you can, over a hundred people milling about in hopeless confusion in the midst of unbelievable wreckage, with little food, a limited supply of suitable drinking water, and violent tempers that had reached the breaking point. That is what we had here. They were like animals. There were no rules of sanitation; everyone relieved himself wherever the impulse occurred to him. Days went by, and no concerted effort was made to escape from here; each one fancied himself a leader and tried to promote his own hare-brained scheme for getting us out. As a result, we made absolutely no progress.

"I was sickened by it all. Finally I decided that an iron hand was needed. If we were to keep on the way we were going, we'd be buried down here forever. I found three men who shared my views, and together we organized a small cadre of capable men who have become the strong, directing force responsible for what you now see.

"I assure you that it hasn't been a simple task; there were many who opposed us violently—and there are some

who still do—but slowly and surely we have molded a mass of confusion into an efficient working body which has practically brought us to the eve of accomplishment. Elections? How far do you suppose we would be by now if we waited to have elections? Elections are a luxury reserved for people who are intelligent enough to make use of them."

"By God, you're right!" Carl broke in.

The Co-ordinator turned to him with a warm smile. "Yes," he said, "but believe it or not, there are several people who don't agree with us. Every day we find one or two ungrateful ones. Agitators, we call them. Trouble-makers. But we've found ways of dealing with them. We've made up our minds that nothing and nobody is going to stand in the way of our goal. We must get to the surface as soon as possible!"

"And what will it be like once we get to the surface?" Cassie asked, frowning.

The Co-ordinator turned to her with a smile, but let it fade when he saw the frown on her face. "Who can tell?" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "We'll know better after we've succeeded in getting a few men out to report on conditions above. If we find that what has happened is universal, as I strongly suspect it is, and that our survival will depend on continuing our concerted effort, then that is how it must be.

"If my guess is right," he went on, "at first there won't be too much food; tons of rubble will have to be cleared away, new homes will have to be built. We'll have to start

a whole new world—right from scratch. Now it seems to me that this can only be done if we stick together, if our efforts are properly directed and controlled. We've got a lot of adjustments to make in this new world of ours, and we can succeed only if we stick together."

"Under your leadership of course," Chuck insinuated.

Again the man named Simpson began to rise, and again the Co-ordinator restrained him. "No, Mr. Simpson," he said, "they're new; it's only natural." Turning to Chuck, he said, "Maybe Yes and maybe No. It all depends. If I feel I'm needed, I'll continue to lead. But let us understand each other right from the start. I did not assume leadership because I have a taste for power or because I want to lay claim to any special privileges. I've done it simply because I have a strong desire to survive all this. At the time, it appeared to me that the only way I could guarantee my survival was to take things in hand myself. And if, when we get out of here, it appears that I will survive only if I retain the leadership, then by all means I will do that.

"Has it occurred to you, young man, that all through this city, in other subway lines, in other deep places, there are other survivors? Has it occurred to you that they, too, will eventually get to the surface? Now what does that mean to us? I can only guess, of course, but isn't it possible that at first there will not be enough food to go around? That there will be severe competition for the shelter, fuel, and clothing that are available? Now picture this: On one hand you have a loose, disorganized mob of

people roaming the streets. On the other hand you have a tightly knit, well-disciplined group. Which has the better chance of survival? And if it ever came to a conflict between these two groups, which do you think would come out on top?"

"You paint a pretty dreary picture," Arthur said quietly. "We've got the whole world to live in, yet you've got us fighting pitched battles with one another the moment we get to the surface."

"Perhaps you're right," the Co-ordinator replied. "Perhaps I have exaggerated this thing in my mind. But don't you agree that it would make good sense to go to the surface prepared for just such a situation?"

"No, I don't think so at all," Arthur said. "If all the survivors all over the world come to the surface with the same idea in mind, we'd be in pretty bad shape. Look, mister, why can't you just look at this simply? We've all been saved from death, though God knows why, and we all want to make a new and better life for ourselves. We want to do this as quickly as possible. But we can't do it by starting out where the old world left off. We've had enough of hating and fighting and killing!"

The three Assistants rose quickly and moved menacingly toward Arthur. The Co-ordinator ordered them to stop, and they held back reluctantly.

"That won't be necessary, men," the Co-ordinator said, staring straight at Arthur. "He will learn. You are a fast learner, aren't you?"

Arthur said nothing and looked at the four men. The

three Assistants towered over the Co-ordinator, their somber-colored suits contrasting with his yellowish Palm Beach suit.

"We've done enough talking for now," the Co-ordinator went on harshly. "It's time you got to work. Each of you will be given a definite work assignment, and you will be expected to perform it to the best of your ability. Those who do not work receive no food. Follow all instructions given you and keep your mouths shut. It will be to your advantage to do exactly as you are told. If you join the agitators and troublemakers, you will soon find out that we have very effective ways of dealing with you. We'll stand for no nonsense here. I'm telling you this so that you will know exactly where we stand right from the start." He paused, and his voice softened. "In conclusion, let me say that if some of our practices seem harsh, please remember that this is all being done for your welfare."

Arthur pondered for a moment on the phrase "This is all being done for your welfare," and then from somewhere in the back of his mind a dim memory pushed forward. It was something that had happened when he was a boy. Yes, in the parlor that night Mom was taken away. Suddenly he saw a blurred vision of hands busily polishing spectacles, and he remembered how he had wondered if glasses could be worn out if they were polished too much.

As the Co-ordinator walked across the level, Arthur turned to the others. Their faces looked as if they were

cast in plaster of Paris. He wanted to shout at them, beat at them, force the blood back into their faces so that he could see that they were still human, that they, too, felt the disgust that convulsed his stomach.

But he remained silent, held his fists at his sides, and slowly turned away from them.

CHAPTER 17

THE CRACKLING of the fires fell pleasantly on the ear, and the warm orange glow softened even the cold white tile walls, but Arthur could not sleep. Although his body had sunk into lethargy, his mind stayed awake. All day long as he worked on the upper level, he had churned over the same thoughts. He hoped that when night came he would be able to set them aside for a while and get some sleep, but they would not go away. If only he could examine them one at a time, in order of importance, in chronological order—in any order at all.

He shut his eyes and tried to make his mind a blank, at first for a few seconds, then gradually for a longer time, until at last he felt himself slipping off to sleep.

Run away!

He paid no attention to the voice. It was what he had been trying to escape all day, the impulse that had come when he looked into Red Beard's eyes and again when he heard the Co-ordinator speak.

"Art, don't!" It was Hirsch. Arthur awoke to see the cabbie's face, scarlet and contorted, inches from his own.

"Are you sick, Art?" Hirsch gasped. "You were mumbling something and tossing and turning. I touched you to see if you were all right and you grabbed me and tried to strangle me."

"I'm sorry, Hirsch. It was some sort of a dream."

"Try to go back to sleep, Art. You worked hard today. We should all go to sleep. What is the use of sitting here all night looking into each other's faces like a bunch of dummies?"

"No," Arthur said, "sleeping doesn't do any good. I'd rather do my thinking while I'm awake."

"Thinking about what, Art?"

"You can ask me that, Hirsch? Why haven't you gone to sleep? What's keeping you up? Is it that you're doing some thinking, too?"

Hirsch slowly nodded his head, sighed, and looked away.

"It seems we've all been busy with our thoughts," Arthur went on, looking around the fire. "All except Thomas, that is."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Carl said, yawning. "No thoughts are keeping me awake. It's this

damn back of mine. If I have to sleep on concrete for many more nights, I'll be ruined for life."

"Your back is all that bothers you?" Arthur asked quietly. "Nothing else?"

"Art, Art," Hirsch broke in, "you are getting too excited. Maybe it is not as bad as we think."

"Not as bad? Listen, Hirsch, I think it's so bad it makes me want to puke!"

"So help me," Carl said, stifling another yawn, "I don't know what you fellows are talking about."

Garnet moved closer to the fire and began toasting his hands. "Mr. Hirsch is right," he said, keeping his eyes on his hands. "It probably isn't as dark as it seems. And remember, we have a great deal to be thankful for. We have warmth, we have food, and we're well on our way to the surface."

"But tell me, Reverend," Arthur said, "is this what you had in mind when you talked about building your new world? Is this your idea of how a bunch of second-chancers should start out?"

Garnet pulled his hands away from the fire and stared at the new calluses on them. Finally he turned to Arthur with an expression of annoyance on his face and said, "My dear friend, that's a very unfair question. I am not in a position to say how things shall be done. If I were, naturally it would not be as it is. But I hardly think we have the right to criticize when so much is being done for——"

"For our welfare!" Arthur interrupted.

"Yes, for our welfare," Garnet continued. "You expect too much for the beginning. Be patient. I'm sure that once we have established ourselves on the surface, we'll find that we can begin building a good, peaceful life for ourselves. Just to give you an example, I had a little chat with Mr. Rawlings, one of the Assistants, and he assured me that the Co-ordinator intends that the church shall play a very important part in our rehabilitation once we are completely organized."

"That's great," Arthur said. "Then you can hold a big memorial service for the poor slobs who got lost in the organizing."

"Please!" Garnet frowned, turning back to his callused hands.

"This reminds me of something you said the night we buried Hank," Arthur went on. "You said that maybe we weren't killed right off because we were being saved for a later destruction. Maybe you were right, Reverend. Maybe we won't have to wait too long.

"This afternoon, while I was digging up there," he said, nodding toward the second level, "they were having another meeting. In a little while our friend Elliot came along and brought an old man over to them. I couldn't see too well because we were raising a lot of dust with the digging, but I was able to see well enough that the old man was scared white. The Co-ordinator spoke to him for a few minutes and then motioned for Elliot to take him away. That was when the old man began screaming —you must have heard him—and tried to get away. Then,

cool as a cucumber, this Elliot picked up a stone and threw it at the old man. It hit him in the back of the head, and he went down like a sack of flour."

Garnet refused to lift his gaze from his hands.

"A few of us dropped our shovels," Arthur continued, "and began to go to him, but suddenly ten men sprang up from out of nowhere and blocked our way. They warned us to stay back or else. Then the Co-ordinator came forward and made a little speech. The old man was a thief, he said. He was caught stealing from the central food supply. The Co-ordinator said he was sorry about his dying—yes, the old man died—but he shouldn't have tried to escape his punishment and it never would have happened. And of course, he said to us, we wouldn't want a food thief to go unpunished—especially when he was stealing the food right out of our mouths. A very effective speech it was. It worked like a wonder. Oh, there was a little buzzing for a while, but in a few minutes everybody was back at work and the old man had been carried away, forgotten."

Carl began to interrupt, but Arthur waved him off. "Let me finish. That's only part of the story. Right now you're all probably thinking: It's too bad the old man had to die, but he really shouldn't have stolen the food. Well frankly, I began to think that myself. After all, stealing food when so many people are hungry is a lousy thing to do. But then I found something out. The man working next to me kept looking at me like he had to tell me something or bust. I edged closer to him and he whis-

pered something to me. He knew the old man. They sat at the same fire. Two days ago the old man folded up like an accordion from exhaustion. Well, it seems that the 'No work, no food' rule applies to sick people, too. And so for two days the old man didn't eat. Finally he had to steal. And now he's dead."

"Ah, it's probably a lot of baloney," Carl said, nervously touching his chest over his heart. "I mean about him not getting anything to eat for two days."

"No, it's true," Phyllis said. "Someone told Chuck the same thing, didn't they, honey?"

Chuck nodded.

Arthur looked around the circle and felt heartened. "Why do you look so shocked?" he said. "The Co-ordinator made things pretty clear. Did you think he was kidding us? He meant every word he said."

"Well, you've got to have some discipline," Carl said. "If you didn't, everybody would goof off and let the other fellow do all the work. You just have to have discipline or you don't get anywhere. Look at this," he said, holding out a handful of prunes, "we've got something to eat, and pretty soon we're going to get out of here. And you know what we can thank for all this? Discipline. Listen, we don't have the right to crab; we've been treated pretty fair considering we just came. What right have we got to kick about how things are being run? If any of us were running this show, we'd probably do it the same way."

Thomas was awake now and was nodding his head

forcefully. "That's right," he joined in. "The Co-ordinator knows what he's doing, all right. And as far as I'm concerned, he's doing O.K. At least he's getting us out of here, and that's all I care about. I'm getting good and tired of this darn subway."

Arthur turned to Chuck. "And how about you?" he asked. "Are these the men who are going to lead you to that shining new world of yours with all that beauty you spoke of? Is it going to be that world filled with beautiful music? Did they give you assurances like they did the reverend? Or were you afraid to ask? Maybe you felt the way I did and your tongue was so swollen in your mouth you couldn't move it, and you were afraid to open your mouth because you'd puke all over the place.

"Listen," he said, turning to the others, "I heard your pretty speeches a couple of nights ago, and I believe you meant most of what you said. And none of your dreams included anything like this. You were going to make up for all the mistakes that had been made in the other world. You, Hirsch—you said that maybe we'd learned our lesson and that now we wouldn't hate and kill each other. Yet an old man is killed because he's too sick to work. And it won't end there. When we go to the surface we'll go as an army—and God pity those who can't keep up with us or come up against us."

"Take it easy, for God's sake," Chuck said in a tight voice. "Basically we all agree with you—there's no need to lecture us. Sure we don't like what's going on, but what in hell can we do about it? You can't change things

overnight. These things take time, and you've got to be willing to make a few compromises until you're strong enough to do some good. Take it easy, Art. We'll have our chance later. Right now I'm interested in just one thing: getting to the surface. And so is everybody else. And the Co-ordinator is getting us there, so I don't give a damn how he's doing it!"

"But don't you understand that once you begin making compromises you can never stop? It's like being stuck in quicksand—you keep going in deeper and deeper until it's too late."

"But we won't let it get too late," Phyllis argued. "Chuck and I want the same things you do. We don't like any of this. But Chuck is right; we've got to wait until we're in a position to make things better. Once we get up, we'll work day and night for a better world, won't we, honey? But the main thing now is to get out of here."

Arthur looked around the circle. Cassie was missing. He wondered when she had gone, for he had not seen her leave. Beside her empty place sat Hirsch, his head bent low with eyes half closed. He seemed pressed to the ground by the weight of a burden he carried on his shoulders and all at once he seemed a broken old man. Garnet, Thomas, and Carl were frowning; and Chuck's and Phyllis's faces had identical expressions of anxiety.

Hundreds of fiery words gathered on Arthur's tongue, but suddenly he found that he could not open his mouth. Somewhere behind him he could feel a pair of cold eyes fixed on him, piercing through the back of his head and

freezing his lips. He turned and looked into the unswerving eyes of the young man with the red beard.

"You have been talking too loud," Red Beard said, looking only at Arthur. "People are trying to sleep, and you're disturbing them."

Arthur looked back at the others and winced. Their eyes were downcast, and they looked like children caught at the cookie jar.

"I might warn you," Red Beard went on, "that the Co-ordinator does not approve of talking when it is time to sleep, especially your kind of talk. I should report you for this, but since you are newcomers, I'll forget about it this time. The sooner you all learn to keep your mouths shut, the better off you'll be."

Arthur watched the others as Red Beard spoke and noted unmistakable sparks of resentment in the eyes of two or three of them. Red Beard went on to warn them of an earlier rising, but Arthur was not listening to him. He was intently watching the others' faces.

"And so good night," Red Beard concluded, and walked off toward the leaders' fire upstairs.

"Good night," Arthur called out cheerfully, and then turned to the others, smiling. None of them returned his smile; they stared back at him with stolid faces. But a little before he had seen something on some of their faces. He could almost swear he had seen it.

CHAPTER 18

THEY WERE AWAKENED by the old man bringing them their rations of prunes. Arthur saw that Cassie's place beside Hirsch was still empty. "There's one of us missing," he said to the old man with the prunes. "Leave her ration here and I'll give it to her when she gets back."

"She won't be coming back," the old man said. "She's up at the leaders' fire, and it looks like she's there to stay. Pretty good, eh?" he added with a wink.

And he had been worried about her, Arthur thought, afraid that she might be sick. Sick in another way maybe, but not the kind of sickness he should give a damn about.

"You better get a move on, folks," the old man warned. "They're not going to like it if you're late on the job."

Arthur dropped his prunes into his pocket and rose.

With the others, he stepped forward and joined the stream of people hurrying toward the stairway to the second level. But after going only a short distance, he stopped suddenly and hung back until the rush had passed him by. He glanced behind him to where he had seen a group of women hunting for wood scraps, but did not see Cassie among them. That was probably changed, too, he thought. Surely her elevation to the leaders' circle would mean a promotion from the ranks of the common workers. He turned from the women and started again for the stairway to the second level. It was just as well that he hadn't found her, he decided. What business was it of his anyway what she wanted to be? What the hell was she to him?

When he saw her near the foot of the stairway with the other women, he wanted to run past her, up the stairs—quickly, so that he wouldn't have to ask her. He would ask her some other time. He would find out some other way. Now he just wanted to get upstairs and not have to look at her and ask her.

She saw him as he passed and called to him. He tried not to listen and continued up the stairs, but she called again. He turned and saw her coming up the stairs. He looked down at her face and knew he wouldn't have to ask.

"Art," she began, avoiding his eyes, "I want to explain."

"Never mind," he broke in abruptly. "You know what you're doing."

He turned to go, but her hand was on his arm. "Art,

for God's sake listen!" She turned, flushing, to look down at the women who were staring up at them. "Please, Art, I've got to get back to them. They've put me in charge and we've got to get to work. Please, Art, let me explain."

"So now you're a straw boss. Congratulations."

"Art, it was all a crazy accident. Last night I had a headache and I decided to go for a walk. That's why I left. Then I met Elliot. He told me I wasn't supposed to be walking around. Art, that man frightens me. I don't know what it is—I think it's his eyes. He said to come along with him, and I went. He took me to the leaders' fire upstairs, and I was frightened to death. But then they surprised me. They were so nice. They invited me to stay. I didn't want to, Art. I told them I wanted to get to our fire, but they wouldn't listen. And somehow, Art, although they were as pleasant as could be, I saw something in their eyes that told me I'd better do as they said. I can't explain it, Art, but I just had to say Yes."

"Very cozy," Arthur sneered.

"You don't believe a word I've said, do you?"

"Sure, I believe you. Only I'm having trouble forgetting the wink of a dirty old man."

"If that's what you want to believe, then have it your own way! Why should I give a damn what you believe? What are you to me anyway?"

He reached out to touch her, but she had already turned and started down the stairs. He watched her as she rejoined the women and led them away. Then he felt a

heavy hand on his shoulder, and as he turned with fist clenched, an iron claw caught his wrist and a thousand tons of force smashed into his face.

When he opened his eyes, he was lying on his back at the foot of the stairs. For a long, disordered minute he couldn't remember what had happened, but then he saw the legs of the man who stood above him.

"Come on, come on," a voice said as a pair of hands slid under his arms and lifted him to his feet. "You can't lay here all day. You're late enough as it is. Let's go."

Arthur looked at the man who was holding him and pulling him up the stairs. One of the second level guards. He had seen him up there yesterday. Arthur looked at one of the giant fists and wondered what it had done to his face.

"You shouldn't have tried what you did, buddy," the guard said to him. "All I was going to do was tell you to get to your job, and you go swinging at me. People don't swing at me and get away with it."

"What about my face?"

"Oh, you'll be O.K. You got yourself a beaut of a mouse, but you won't need no plastic surgery. Besides, there's only one part of your face you got to worry about, and that's your nose. Keep it clean, buddy, and you'll stay out of trouble like this. What were you doing talking to that dame anyhow when you're supposed to be on the job?"

"She's a friend of mine. There's something I wanted to talk to her about."

"Well, take a tip, buddy, and steer clear of her. She's been taken out of your league. You ain't got such a hot reputation the way it is, and you ain't going to smell any sweeter to the big boys if they see you fooling around with somebody from their circle."

"Thanks," Arthur said sarcastically.

"Look, buddy, why do you want to make trouble? Can't you be like everybody else and stay in line? I didn't want to hit you—you made me. Do you think I get my kicks by pushing people around? Only, like the Co-ordinator says, if somebody's too dumb to know what's good for them, we got to show them. Don't you want to get out of here, buddy?"

Arthur did not have to answer. They had reached the foot of the stairway to the street where the men were digging and another guard had approached them, carrying a shovel. "Here," this guard said to Arthur, extending the shovel, "get busy. And don't go being late again."

Arthur took the shovel and left the two guards, who were shaking their heads at him. He joined the other diggers and thrust his shovel into the debris. But when he lifted it, something suddenly snapped in his arms and he dropped it to the ground.

"Pick it up! Pick it up!" the guard shouted at him.

He bent over for it, but his legs folded and he fell forward onto the debris. There was a wonderful lightness in his head, and somehow the pain had disappeared, but he felt a queer tightness that locked every part of him.

"What the hell's going on?" the guard growled, coming over to him.

"I can't move," Arthur murmured.

The diggers had stopped work and were standing in a loose circle around them.

"Come on, get back to work!" the guard shouted at them. "And you, too," he said to Arthur. "Come on, no faking here. Get back to work."

The diggers did not move and seemed to tighten their circle. The guard stared uneasily at them for a moment and then hurriedly broke through them and disappeared across the level. He was gone only a few minutes, and when he returned, there was a pretense of a smile on his face.

"Didn't realize you was so sick," he said to Arthur. "Why didn't you say so in the first place? The Co-ordinator don't want nobody working if they're sick. Here, you," he said to one of the diggers, "give your shovel to somebody else and help this man get back to his fire."

A number of hands reached down to help him up, and when he was on his feet, someone stretched his arm over the back of a man who began leading him toward the stairway. At first Arthur did not look at this man; he had to devote his full attention to making his legs behave the way they should. It wasn't until they had gotten down the stairs and had stopped to rest that he took the time to look at him. It was the man who had talked to him yesterday, the one who had told him about the old man who had been killed.

Arthur suddenly forgot his terrible weariness and smiled at the man. This was something he wouldn't have dared to hope for, to be alone with the only man he'd met so far who wanted to talk. But the man did not want to talk. He did not even acknowledge Arthur's smile. "I have to get back," he said urgently. "They'll be waiting for me, so I can't take too long. Please!"

Arthur did not try to talk again until they reached his fire. Then, as the man helped him to the ground, Arthur grasped his arm and pulled him down with him. "Listen," he said close to the man's face, "there are some things I've got to know. You've got to talk to me. You wanted to yesterday."

"But they'll know! I've got to get back. Please, let me go!"

"Just one minute. Give me one minute."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "All right," he whispered, "but quickly—I've got to get back."

Arthur released the man's arm and smiled. "Thanks. It was lucky he picked you."

"Please!"

"All right, the first thing I want to know is: Was it true what you said yesterday about the old man? That he wasn't given any rations?"

"Yes, of course it's true. I told you he sat at my fire."

"How long have you been with the Co-ordinator?"

"From the very beginning. We were in the same station Downtown when it happened, and I came up here with him."

"Then you know how all this started. Tell me, how did he become so powerful in such a short time? How was it possible?"

The man relaxed for a moment. "Yes," he reflected, "I know what you mean. It's the question I've been asking myself all along. I don't know, I guess it was a combination of things. The first thing in his favor was the complete confusion down here. He was the first to do something about it. His strength attracted strength until he became completely surrounded by strong men, like our guard. When the food ran out, some of his men found the prunes and the vegetables. And when you have control over the only supply of food—well, you have control over everything, don't you? We were weak and he was strong. It's as simple as that, I guess."

"But is this what everybody wants? Being pushed around, afraid to talk to each other?"

"Everybody?" He shook his head. "Nobody."

"Then why have you let him become so powerful? Why haven't you done something about it?"

"Oh, there have been attempts. Three of them to be exact. But they failed, and the men who were responsible suddenly turned up missing."

"But why did they fail?"

"Why? Because each time they thought that all they had to do was start a rebellion and the crowd would follow. But the crowd did not follow. The fear in this place turns men into jelly."

"But if we spread the word! If we show them what will happen otherwise!"

The man rose, smiling sadly. "You're just like those others who tried. They thought they would be successful, too. But you won't be. Forget about it. The crowd will not follow you." He turned and began to walk away.

"Wait!" Arthur shouted.

The man turned.

"If I do," Arthur began slowly, "will you follow me?"

The man lifted his eyes and stared blankly across the level. "No," he whispered, "no . . ."

* * *

Carl Norman lifted what seemed to be his millionth shovelful of debris and emptied it into the carton at his feet. In a second the box was removed and another dropped in its place. How much longer? he moaned to himself. How many more boxes to fill before he could stop? A stabbing pain had begun in his left arm just after the afternoon break. It was the same arm that had hurt so badly when he'd had that attack. He quickly pushed the thought aside. He had to keep working. Not that he believed that crap about the old man not getting any food because he couldn't work. That wasn't why he had to keep working. Hell no! He wanted to work so that it would be that much quicker getting out. That story about the old man was just a lot of crap that Art made up. Trying to stir them up, that's all. If he couldn't work, they'd feed him. Damn right they would.

Suddenly it was hard to breathe. He opened his mouth, but the dust made him choke, and he doubled up in a violent fit of coughing. When it stopped, he saw that the others had laid down their shovels and cartons and had begun to leave, and he almost cried out in relief. He dropped his shovel and began to follow, massaging his aching arm. Oh, it was going to be good to sit down again, he thought. As soon as he ate his ration, he was going to go to sleep. Then maybe the ache in his arm would go away. All he needed was a little sleep. The ache probably had nothing to do with his heart. He just wasn't used to shoveling, that's all. But as he began to go down the stairs, he had to hold onto the railing because of a fuzziness in his head, and the last thing that flashed through his mind before he lost consciousness was Art's story of the old man.

As he came to, he felt the warmth of a fire on his face and he slowly opened his eyes. They were all there in a circle, Chuck, Phyllis, Garnet, and the others.

"How do you feel?" Thomas asked him.

What the hell did he mean by that? He felt fine.

"Here's your ration," Thomas said, handing him the prunes. "I saved them for you."

"What'd I do," he asked, sitting up, "fall asleep?"

"I'll say." Thomas laughed.

"Don't you know, Carl?" Chuck asked. "You passed out. Up there on the stairs."

"That's a lie! I did not!"

"Take it easy, old man," Chuck said. "I'm not accusing

you of a crime. I merely said you passed out. And you did. You've been out for over half an hour."

Carl felt his left arm. It still ached. Some of the sharpness was gone, but it still ached. He looked at the others. Why were they all looking so sorry for him? Why were they looking at him like that? "I can still work!" he shouted at them.

"Of course you can," Garnet said reassuringly.

"And even if I couldn't," Carl went on, looking directly at Art, "it wouldn't make any difference. If you think for a minute I believed your story about the old man, you're crazy!"

Everyone seemed to look away at once, avoiding his eyes. All except Art, who had that sad smile on his face.

"Well, what's the matter? What's gotten into all of you?"

Art kept looking at him with that smile. "Carl," he finally said to him, "I think there's something you should know. I had a little trouble this morning and I couldn't work. When the man with the rations came around, he passed them out to everyone but me. I asked for mine, and he told me I wasn't getting any. You see, I hadn't done my share of the work today."

"You're lying! You're just trying to scare me."

"No, Carl, I'm not lying. And do you want to know something funny? I'm not sure I believed that story about the old man myself. Deep down, I mean. Somehow it didn't seem possible. But, brother, tonight I got proof positive."

Carl looked down at the prunes Thomas had given him and closed his hand around them. A lousy couple of prunes. Almost no better than nothing, yet they made the difference between getting out of this hole alive or not.

"Look," Art said to him, "we've been doing some talking. Frankly, I was sort of glad you were out, because you wouldn't have agreed with what we were talking about. But now I think you will. Now I think you're ripe."

"What is it?" Carl asked.

"We're going to do something about all this."

"Are you crazy?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. We've just got to do something, that's all."

"But what, Art?" Chuck asked. "You still haven't told us what. Tell us and we'll listen."

"I don't know. It's not clear in my mind. Just something! We've got to start something. Bring this thing to a head."

"They'll stop it," Hirsch said quietly. He snapped his fingers. "Like that they'll stop it."

"Then let them. At least we'll have tried. We'll have showed them we're human beings and not animals to be led around by our noses."

"What, Art?" Chuck persisted. "Tell us what."

"All right, how's this?" Art began hurriedly. "It's not clear in my mind yet, but how about this: When we go to work tomorrow, each one of us whispers to the person

on either side of him. I don't know, maybe something like 'Down with tyranny.' We spread the word for a general strike. Get everybody to stop work and protest what's been going on."

"For God's sake, Art," Chuck snorted. "Are you out of your mind? What in hell will that accomplish? And what makes you think you're going to get anybody to spread the word?"

"You're perfectly right, Chuck, I don't know if it will accomplish a single thing. And I don't know that they'll spread the word or stop work. But we've got to do something, I tell you, and this is the only thing I can think of."

"O.K.," Chuck began patiently, "granted that they do stop work. What then? Where do we go from there?"

"Well don't you see? It'll be a sign of unity. It'll mean we were right and that these people want to be free. We'll be able to do anything we want. We'll have a mass action, and even the Co-ordinator and his mob won't be able to fight that. We'll squash them!"

"I don't know," Chuck floundered. "It sounds . . . I don't know, it sounds hare-brained."

"Who can tell?" Hirsch said, nodding his head and scratching his chin.

"You can see it, can't you, Hirsch?" Art asked eagerly.

"I don't know, I don't know."

Carl had been listening to every word. Jesus Christ, he thought, how was a fellow supposed to make up his mind about all this talk? One minute it made sense and the next he wanted to get the hell out of there before someone

came along and overheard them. If this crazy scheme came off, he wouldn't have to worry about not getting fed if he couldn't work. But if it backfired, things were sure to get worse. What the hell was a fellow supposed to think?

"Look," Art began more calmly, "I'm not going to ask who's with me and who's not. I've made up my mind to go through with this. I'm not letting another day go by with things as they are. If you want to go along with me, fine; if not, no questions asked. Tomorrow morning, as soon as we start work, I'm going to begin. When I feel the time is ripe, when I think everybody has gotten the message, I'll give the signal for the strike. I'll yell, loud enough for everybody to hear. I'll be hoping that all of you will be the first to stop work."

"But, Art," Chuck said, "if it doesn't work, you'll be left holding the bag. It'll be suicide."

"I guess so. But it's suicide if we don't do this, isn't it?"

No one answered, and Carl looked around the circle, studying each face. What would each of them decide? What if it didn't come off? His arm began to ache again. He wouldn't be able to sleep.

CHAPTER 19

IN THE MORNING Arthur purposely avoided speaking to the others. He had sat up all night thinking about each member of their group, trying to decide what each would do when the signal was given. Some had been easy. You didn't have to be an expert to predict what they would do. They would not respond. At least not until everyone else had and there was no more danger. But some had been difficult. Garnet, for example. What would he do? Phyllis would do whatever Chuck did, but what about Chuck? If there were enough of them in those first few seconds, then perhaps the rest of the crowd would follow. But would there be enough? Would Chuck be one of them? And old Hirsch, who seemed to want to do nothing but sit around and feel sorry for himself?

Perhaps Chuck was right and he'd be left holding the bag. Perhaps none of them would respond. He looked at the others. If only he could talk to them, ask them point-blank what they were going to do.

He rose and began to walk away. Chuck, Phyllis, Hirsch, Garnet, Thomas, and Carl. People who had meant nothing to him and who now meant so much. And there was Cassie, of course. What would she have said had she been with them? And how would she respond?

"Art."

He turned toward the voice, but did not see her. He shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and began to move on. If only he hadn't been in so damn much of a hurry to eat her out yesterday.

"Art, here!"

She was standing beside a steel column over in a dark corner. She ducked back behind the column, and he quickly went over to her.

"Cassie," he said, when he came up to her, "I was just thinking about you, about yesterday. I guess I was pretty hot under the collar."

"Not now, Art. We haven't time. I wanted to talk to you because I heard what happened to you afterward. Art, they're not finished with you. They think you're a troublemaker. Elliot told me they're going to watch every move you make. You've got to be careful, Art."

"What else did he tell you?" he asked, grasping her arms. "Does he know about the plan?" Then he saw her frightened expression and released her.

"Art, what are you thinking of doing? What's this plan?"

He looked at her for a long time. He hadn't planned to tell her. She was no longer a member of their group. She had denied it and he believed her, but she still sat with the leaders.

"Art, you're not going to do anything crazy, are you?"

They would both be late for their jobs. She was taking a chance talking to him like this. He smiled at her and reached out and placed his hand on her arm. She raised her hand to his arm and returned his smile. Then he knew he could tell her.

"Cassie, in a little while we're going to bring all this to a head. We're going to try to pass the word for a general strike. If it works, we're going to have a showdown with the Co-ordinator."

She stared at him as if he had slapped her.

"You're crazy!"

"Please, Cassie, you can help an awful lot. You're the leader of a group. If you respond to the signal, the others in your group will follow."

"No, Art, no!"

"My God, Cassie, don't you want to put a stop to all this?"

"But if it doesn't work, Art, they'll kill you."

"Yes," he answered, trying to make it sound casual, but he could not help shuddering.

"Art, please don't do it. Be patient. We'll be out of here soon, and then we can get away from them. Why

should you worry about everybody else? They don't give a damn about you. Just try this thing and fail and you'll see how much they care about you. They won't lift a finger to save you."

"I'm sorry, Cassie, but I can't wait and I can't run away. I believe there are enough people down here who feel the same way. All they need is a little pushing. That's what I'm going to give them. I was sort of hoping you'd be one of us."

He shrugged his shoulders, turned, and walked away. He heard her call to him, but he did not stop. He had made the mistake with her that he'd been afraid of making with Chuck and the others. He had asked her. He should have been satisfied, as he would have to be now, with a guess.

The guard at the job seemed to believe him when he said he was late because he'd had to go to the toilet, for he handed him a shovel and sent him into the line of diggers without saying a word. Arthur took his place in the line and pushed his shovel into the debris. He turned with the laden shovel to look for an empty carton and saw beside him the man who had helped him yesterday. Arthur could have sworn that he had not been there at first. That meant that he had moved over to him, that he wanted to be near him. He smiled at the man and was not disappointed when the smile was not returned. The man had wanted to be close to him, and that was the main thing.

When the guard was looking the other way, Arthur straightened up and peered out over the heads of the

other diggers. Over in a far corner he could make out Chuck and Garnet working side by side. He knew he could never catch their eyes—they wouldn't dare look up—but he stared at them nonetheless until the guard turned suddenly and caught him, and he pretended that he had been trying to get something out of his eye. He returned to his digging and filled half a dozen cartons with debris before he dared turn from his shovel again. When he did, he turned first to the man on his left, the man who had dared to move closer to him, and studied his face. Would he pass on the message? He turned to the man on his right, a short, flabby man who looked as if he were going to weep. What would he do?

He straightened up once again and drew a deep breath. Then he bent over his shovel and moved closer to the little man on his right. "End tyranny—stop work at signal!" he whispered. He turned away quickly, edged over to the man on his left, and repeated the message. Only this time he did not turn away. He kept his eyes on the tight lips. And then the lips parted in a smile.

Arthur turned back to his shovel and began digging furiously; now it was a matter of time. He turned again to his right, and his heart sank when he saw that the little man looked as glum as ever. But then he looked beyond him and saw a head turn to another, and he heard whispering. He turned to his left and there, too, saw a head turn, and then another and another.

* * *

Carl Norman heard the whispering and began to tremble. Breathing deeply, he set down the carton he was carrying. What should he do when the signal came? He touched his arm gingerly and jumped with the pain that shot all the way up to his head.

He reached into his pocket and felt the single prune he had put there this morning. He had been given four, but he had decided to save one. And he would save one from each meal from now on. Then, in case anything happened and he couldn't work, he would have what he'd saved. If only he hadn't eaten all that candy at once. But he had been afraid they would search each other. It had almost made him sick, and the very next day he had been just as hungry as ever.

A guard was walking toward him with a mean look on his face. "Come on, you, pick up that box!" he yelled.

"Listen," Carl said to the guard breathlessly, "take me to the Co-ordinator. I've got something to tell him!"

CHAPTER 20

THE WHISPERING was growing, getting louder, spreading faster. More and more heads were turning. Men were looking up from their work. It was working. They would respond!

Just a little while longer, another minute or so, Arthur decided. The message had to reach the farthest corners, the level below. Give it time. But don't wait too long, don't miss the strategic moment. Don't wait a second too long or they'll think it's a bluff and lose their courage.

Now the whispering became a low, steady hum. It was working! He was right, they wanted to be free! They would follow!

And then came silence. A cold, terrifying silence. Had he waited too long? Arthur dropped his shovel and

turned. Then he understood the silence. Coming across the level, flanked on either side by five tall men, was the Co-ordinator. And trailing behind were all the workers from the lower level. As they proceeded toward the leaders' fire in the far corner, the Co-ordinator's men beckoned with smiling faces to the workers on this level and soon they, too, joined the procession.

Arthur looked at the passing faces and knew it was too late. Why had the Co-ordinator appeared at this very minute?

The crowd assembled near the leaders' fire and stood there silently, looking up at the Co-ordinator and his three Assistants who had climbed up to an improvised dais. The four men were talking and laughing among themselves, but finally the Co-ordinator turned to the crowd and raised his hand. Then in a soft, mellow voice he said, "My friends, it is with a joyous heart that I have called this meeting. I have news for you, fellow workers, that will indeed cheer your hearts, too." He turned to his three Assistants and smiled. The crowd edged closer and a dim mumbling began to grow out of it. The Co-ordinator held up his hand again and stood stiffly erect. "Friends," he shouted this time, "tomorrow we go to the surface!"

Deafening cheers rose to the ceiling and echoed through the station. People hugged each other and began to dance and sing. Arthur turned away from the crowd and looked over at the stairway to the street. He had been working there and knew how much progress could be made in a

day. And at the rate they had been working, it would be at least another four or five days.

The Co-ordinator was holding up his hand again, but the people were not easily quieted, and it seemed as if they would never stop cheering. The three Assistants stepped beside the Co-ordinator and held up their hands, too, and in a little while the cheering lessened gradually and finally stopped. The Assistants stepped back again, and the Co-ordinator continued, reverting to his soft, mellow tone.

"Friends," he said, "I know how happy you are to receive this news, but at the same time we must not forget that we are taking up valuable time. We must get back to work and work even harder than before if we are to make what I have announced a reality.

"Yes, it is true, my friends, that with a little luck, we should be on our way to the surface in another day. We have devised a new work system which will give us more efficient results than in the past. There is a better way of doing practically everything and, my friends, we have found a better way of digging ourselves out of here. Let this serve as an example of what can be accomplished when our efforts are co-ordinated and disciplined.

"A short while ago we were a mob of people going nowhere. We would have starved to death if first we hadn't killed each other off. But now we are on the eve of success, ready to climb to the surface and begin rebuilding a new and better world for ourselves. Now tell me, isn't this what you wanted? I can tell by the looks on your

faces that it is. But would you believe it," and here he turned momentarily to his Assistants and shook his head unbelievingly, "there are some among us who are opposed to us? Opposed to everything we're trying to accomplish?

"Yes!" he shouted, "I know it's hard to believe, but it's true! There are some men standing right here among us who have tried everything in their power to sabotage our efforts. They have started false rumors, they've tried to stir you up with lies. And why are they doing this? Because they cannot stand being disciplined. They consider themselves too high and mighty to take orders and work like the rest of us. They spout off about loss of freedom and liberty, when everything they do is designed to make you lose yours. Tell me, my friends, how much liberty and freedom do you suppose we'll have if we again become the wild, disunited mob we once were? How much freedom and liberty will we be able to enjoy once we get to the surface and are defenseless against the wild and crazy mobs we're sure to find there?

"But I know," he went on, lowering his voice, "I know that the majority of you do not share the views of these few misfits among us. I know that you feel as disturbed about them as I do. And I'm quite sure that you will agree with me that we must purge ourselves of them before another day passes, before another hour passes, so that we may begin our ascension to the surface completely cleansed of this filth that contaminates us!"

Arthur listened to the words and knew that the Co-

ordinator's victory was complete. It didn't matter that they wouldn't really get to the surface in one more day; another speech would take care of that. And another speech after that, if necessary. The speeches would be endless and they would be effective, like this one that had transformed the crowd into a mass of nodding heads. The Co-ordinator had discovered the sure-fire formula: When the grumbling becomes too loud, break some good news. It doesn't matter if it's true or not, so long as it's good. Then, after the grumbling has been drowned by the cheers, remind them who is responsible for the good news and rally them on to even more devotion to the Cause.

But the source of the grumbling must be exposed and destroyed. That was part of the formula, too, for if the "troublemakers" are not liquidated, how soon after the cheering has died out will they start to agitate again?

Arthur looked up at the dais. The Co-ordinator had stopped speaking and was looking intently into the crowd. Then suddenly he lifted his arm and pointed his finger beyond their heads.

"Him!" he shouted. "Him! Him! Him!"

Him. Arthur watched in fascinated horror as the crowd before him separated down the middle, opening a narrow path along the direction of the Co-ordinator's pointing finger until the finger pointed only at him. Suddenly two men were at his side, and his arms were held behind his back.

"Him, fellow workers! He is the worst of them. A

saboteur! He's done everything he could to destroy our unity! He is the filth I spoke of. He has been with us only a few days, but he has caused nothing but trouble from the moment he came. Him, fellow workers! It is his kind that we must purge ourselves of!"

The two men pushed him forward through the division in the crowd. Arthur glanced at the long row of faces on either side of him as he passed. He tried to look into their eyes, but the faces turned away. They reached the dais, and the two men lifted him onto it. The three Assistants took hold of him and brought him to the Co-ordinator's side.

"This is the worst of the lot, my friends," the Co-ordinator said. "We have definite proof of it." Turning to Arthur and looking him up and down as if he were measuring him for size, he said, "He is one of those who has had so much to say about loss of liberty and freedom. We will show him how mistaken he is, for he will receive a fair trial right here and now. He shall not be prejudged, but will be faced with all the evidence against him. Then you, my friends, will decide what his fate shall be." He turned to one of the Assistants. "Call the first witness."

Elliot stepped out of the crowd and jumped onto the dais. He pulled at his beard for a minute and then turned to face the crowd. "He's a traitor, all right! The second night he was here I overheard him trying to stir up trouble. I heard him saying something about killing the Co-ordinator and taking over himself."

"Thank you, Mr. Elliot," the Co-ordinator said, smil-

ing graciously. "That was the first witness, my friends —a good, honest worker, a man who has our Cause at heart. Now call the next witness."

Carl Norman stepped forward, and one of the Assistants helped him up to the dais.

"I want you to listen carefully to this," the Co-ordinator said. "This man sat at the same fire with the accused. He has been with him all along and knows him better than perhaps anyone else."

Carl began to speak, but his voice cracked and he had to start again. "Yes, he's a traitor, all right. He's always been sort of queer. Right from the beginning. But none of us paid much attention to him. We thought he just liked to talk. Mr. Elliot is right about him trying to stir up trouble. I was sitting at the fire that night, and I heard every word of it. But as I said, I never took him seriously. I thought it was just a lot of talk. Last night he made up this plan about calling a strike. I still didn't believe him because as I said, he was always shooting his mouth off. But then before, when I heard the whispering, I realized he'd meant what he'd said and so I went right over and reported him. The only thing a strike would have done was cause a lot of trouble and take us that much longer to get out of here. And that's probably just what he wanted to happen."

"Thank you, Mr. Norman," the Co-ordinator said, bowing his head. And then, turning to the crowd, he added, "You see, my friends, he has tried to do us serious harm. Here we have been working and working to get out of here, and he comes along just as we are about to real-

ize success and tries to delay us, disunite us, destroy us! Do you need more proof, my friends? There are many more witnesses if you choose to hear them. But I say we've heard enough. This man is a traitor, and he and others like him must be wiped out before they can do us any real damage. I leave it to you, my friends!" he shouted. "What shall it be? What shall we do with him?"

"Wait!" Arthur shouted. "Let me speak! Let me speak!"

One of the Assistants put his hand over Arthur's mouth. Arthur stared down into the buzzing crowd. Hundreds of eyes, but not one pair to look up at him? Suddenly the buzzing grew louder, and the Co-ordinator and his Assistants looked uneasy.

"Well?" the Co-ordinator shouted. "What is your decision?"

There were no answers, no shouts, just the interminable buzzing. The Co-ordinator looked frightened. He held up his hand for silence, but the buzzing continued. Finally a voice broke out of the crowd. "Let him speak!" it called. "Let him tell his side!"

The buzzing ceased instantly, and then other voices echoed the first. "Yes, let him defend himself!"

The Co-ordinator turned hurriedly to his Assistants. Finally he turned back to the crowd and, smiling once more, said, "Of course, my friends, you are right. We promised him a fair trial, and that is what he shall have. By all means he shall have the opportunity to defend him-

self." He turned to Arthur and waved toward the crowd. "The floor is yours."

Arthur stared down into the crowd and smiled. There were eyes in this crowd that would look back at him if only he could find them. "Thank you," he began, "thank you for letting me speak. But you're wrong if you think I wanted to speak in order to defend myself. I don't have to defend myself. I'll admit right off that I'm guilty of being a 'troublemaker.' No, ladies and gentlemen, I'm not going to defend myself; I'm going to be the prosecutor. *I'm* going to be the accuser! And I accuse these men of tyranny! Tyranny! Outright tyranny!"

The three Assistants moved toward him as one, but the Co-ordinator waved them back.

"Look what's become of you," Arthur went on, speaking more rapidly. "You've been afraid to talk to each other. One by one any of you who have dared to question the leaders have been wiped out, just as they're trying to do to me.

"An old man was too sick to work, so they wouldn't give him food. When he stole a few prunes so that he could stay alive, he was killed. A lot of you saw it happen. Then there's Carl Norman, the 'witness.' An informer. And why did he inform? Because he happens to have a bad heart and he was afraid of starving because he won't be able to work. His fear drove him to inform. He probably thought they would make an exception of him, give him a cushy job or something.

"But Norman was right. I *did* try to call a strike. I did it because I believed you didn't want this any more than I did. And for a few minutes there I believed it was going to work. Then the Co-ordinator and his henchmen suddenly turn up with good news. All of a sudden it's going to take only one more day to get out. Those of you who've been working at the exit know damn well it won't be that soon. Don't you see that they just made it up to make you forget about the strike? And it worked! You're so damn excited about getting out of here, you don't care about anything else. And it's a trick they'll use on you time and time again. Everytime you get fed up with the crap they're handing out, they'll stand up and give you a pretty speech full of good news and you'll all take a deep breath and take anything else they want to shovel at you.

"Wake up! Don't you realize you've let go of your freedom piece by piece? And when you do get to the surface, it'll only be worse. Do you think they're going to let go? They'll keep you right under their thumbs, and you won't have a thing to say about what your new world will be. Don't start off by making the same mistakes we made before. Remember why we're all down here in the first place. It will happen again if you let these men lead you!" He saw the three Assistants coming toward him. "Be free!" he shouted. "Go upstairs free! Don't let them——"

One of the Assistants had caught him by the throat.

"Don't let them make slaves——" he managed to

scream out before a hand covered his mouth and pulled him to the back of the dais.

The Co-ordinator stepped into the spot Arthur had occupied and raised his hand, but finally gave up waiting and began to shout repeatedly above the tumult. "Listen, my friends, listen!" The shouting died out after a minute, and the Co-ordinator continued in a softer tone. "My friends, what this man has said is exactly what we expected him to say. That is why we had no serious objections to allowing him to be heard. We knew you would be intelligent enough to consider the source of the words you just heard and to discount them for the distortions they are.

"Remember, friends, this is a man accused of treason, of sabotage! Is it any wonder that he would resort to turning on his accusers with a pack of filthy lies? Don't be fooled by his pretty words. He speaks of freedom, yet he has done everything possible to steal away yours. He could have been loyal and hardworking like you, but he chose instead to disrupt our unity and progress. This speech of his is just another example of how he has tried to destroy us, to make us throw aside everything we've accomplished.

"Ah yes, I am glad now that we have allowed him to speak, for in speaking he has proved the charges against himself more ably and conclusively than we could ever have hoped to do. He's a traitor," he shouted, raising both arms above him, "and he's got to be wiped out so that he can never hurt us again! He's guilty and he must die!"

At that moment the Assistants pushed Arthur off the side of the dais and he fell into the arms of half a dozen of the Co-ordinator's strong men. They pinned his arms to his side and led him to a corner off to the right of the dais where they released him and then backed away, taking up a position between him and the crowd.

"There he stands," the Co-ordinator shouted to the crowd, "a traitor! And he shall meet a traitor's death. If you will remember your Bible, my friends, there was only one way in those days to deal with traitors: death by stoning! I can't think of a better way for him to die, for he should not be executed by only a few. What he has tried to do threatened each and every one of you, so you must all have a part. The stones must come from the hands of all of you, for he is an enemy of the people—all the people—and the people must destroy him!"

Arthur tried to look into the crowd, but could not see past the cold, unblinking eyes of the strong men who had posted themselves in the foreground. The crowd was silent and almost motionless, but how should he interpret this? What was behind the wall of strong men?

The Co-ordinator raised his arms again. "All of you!" he screamed. "It must be all of you! Stone him! Kill him! Kill the traitor!"

The crowd remained silent, and even its slight stirring ceased. But the line of strong men in front began to move toward Arthur, picking up stones along the way. A half dozen others from the body of the crowd joined them, stooping to pick up small jagged pieces of concrete.

Arthur watched for a few seconds as they came toward him, but then turned his gaze back to the crowd. The wall was gone now and he could look into their eyes. But most were downcast. Only a few looked back at him, and in these the only thing he could see was terror. He saw Chuck and Garnet. Terror. And there was Cassie, standing beside Hirsch. Terror. Call to them! Call for help! They'll help! But he remained silent and did not call.

The first stone hit him on the chin, and he raised his hand reflexively. Call to them! Make them help!

Another stone hit him on the shoulder.

"All of you!" the Co-ordinator continued to shout. "All of you!"

Arthur turned his gaze to the ground. He wouldn't beg. That's what he had been doing—begging with his eyes.

The next stone caught him sharply on the temple. And then came the full assault. It was as if shrapnel was tearing into his skin. He felt himself sliding down the wall to a sitting position and he raised his hands to ward off the stones. But it was like trying to stop a thunderstorm by catching the raindrops. And then he dropped his arms. He felt his head dropping forward, but could not find the strength to lift it. He wondered why it was taking so long for blackness to come. It shouldn't be taking this long; he shouldn't have to bear all this pain.

The stones stopped finally—or had they stopped long ago and he had been imagining they were still coming? Nothing seemed to make sense. He opened his eyes and looked at the crowd. They wouldn't stand still for him

to look into their eyes. Why were they moving around so much? Why wouldn't they stand still? He shook his head to clear it and then heard the buzzing. He shook his head again, but the buzzing was not in his head; it was the crowd.

"Tyranny!" he heard someone cry. "Murderers!"

Arthur looked up and saw that the crowd was moving slowly in a broad wedge toward the dais. Chuck, Garnet, Hirsch, Cassie, all of them, were out in front. The terror was gone from their eyes.

"Get back!" the Co-ordinator shouted. "Get back! Have you gone mad?"

But they continued to move forward, stooping to pick up small jagged pieces of concrete.